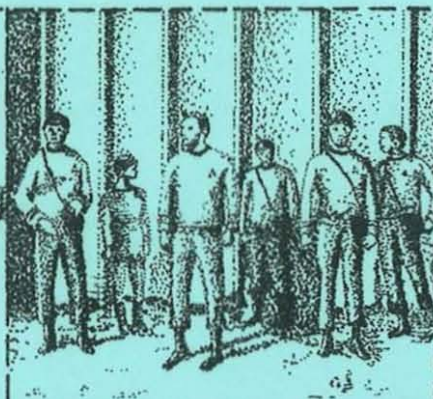
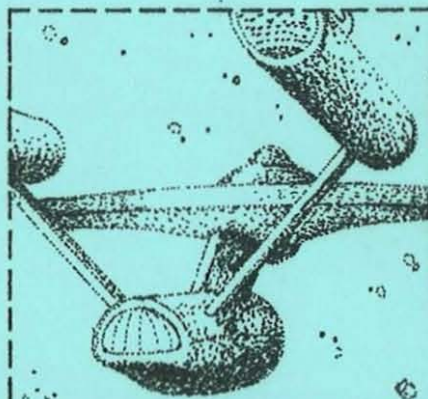
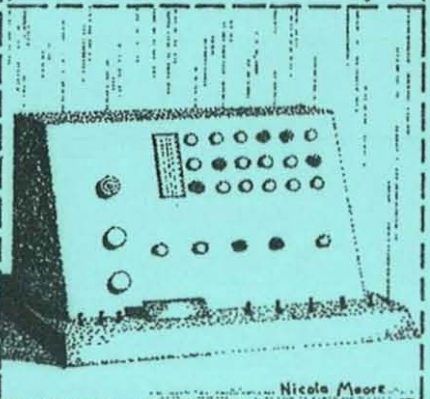
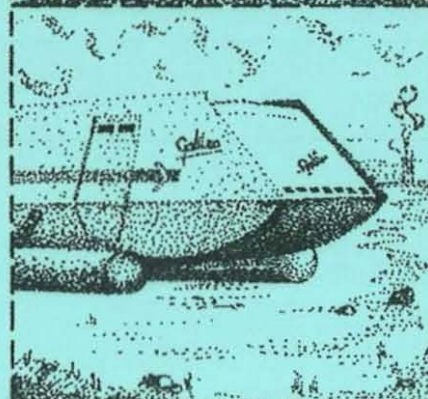
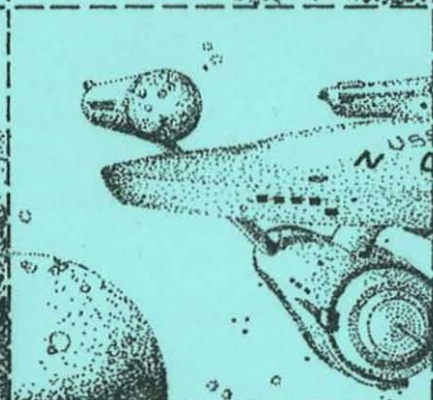
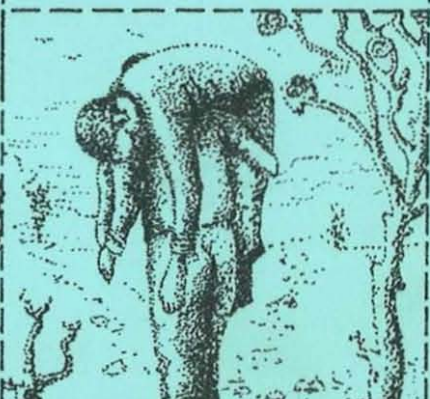
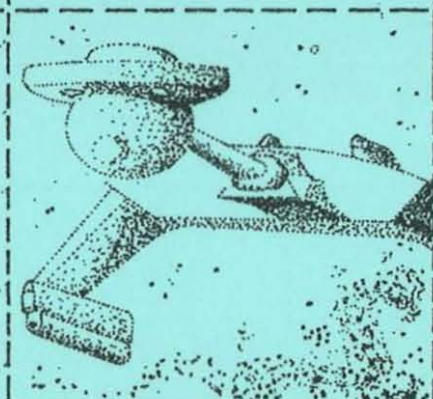
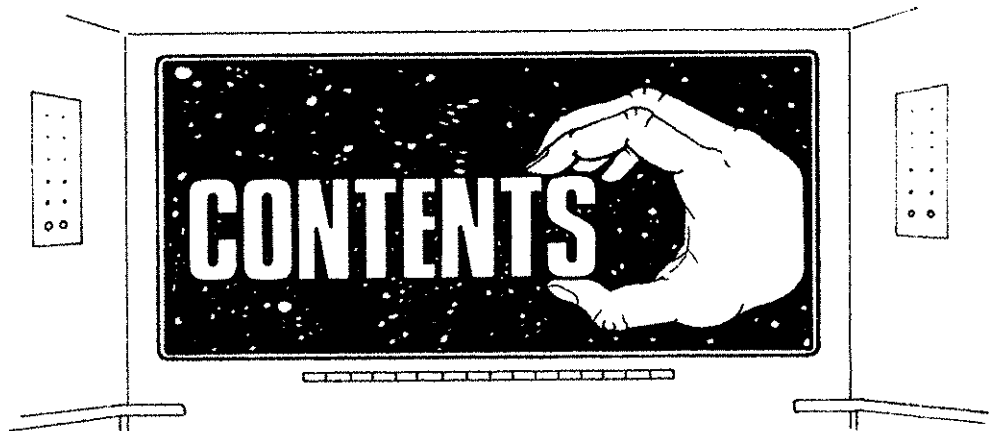




REPEAT MISSIONS



Nicola Moore



Fun and Games	by Margaret Draper	P 3
Reprinted from Log Entries 1		
Daydream	by T.G.Z.C.	P 4
Reprinted from Log Entries 6		
Doubt	by Ann Looker	P 5
Reprinted from Log Entries 1		
Perchance to Dream	by Sheila Clark	P 14
Reprinted from Log Entries 2		
Vulcan's Lament for his Homeland	by Beth Hallam	P 28
Reprinted from Log Entries 1		
A Step in Time	by Valerie Piacentini	P 29
Reprinted from Log Entries 6		
The Riddle	by T.G.Z.C.	P 33
Reprinted from Log Entries 6		
Ara	by Janet Quarton	P 34
Reprinted from Log Entries 3		
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Hello everyone. Welcome to the first issue of our series of reprint zines.

This first issue contains material from Log Entries 1 - 6, though you mightn't think it to look at the contents page - however, LE 4 & 5 are represented, in the form of some of the rather corny jokes on some of the pages.

Log Entries 1 has been out of print for at least three years. We only printed 100 copies, and did not then keep the stencils - in fact we couldn't, for some of them tore. We still had a lot to learn in those days... Beth ran that one off on a hand-cranked school duplicator, staying late to do it. A lot of people have asked us if we were going to reprint LE 1, but the answer has always been no - if only because the main story in it, Beth's Vulcan Odyssey, was the title story in a zine of Beth's stories that was later issued - and some of Beth's other work that appeared in early Log Entries was also in Vulcan Odyssey.

Originally we had hoped to keep back issues of Log Entries in print, but circumstances have decreed otherwise - we put out a new issue of Log Entries every two months, and in addition to that, at least four one-offs each year. The result is that storing the things has become a considerable problem. We're keeping most of the one-offs in print as long as possible, but since LE 7 we decided not to reprint any more issues of Log Entries; instead, we would put out a zine containing the Log Entries stories that have had most favourable comment. Every story in Log Entries has had at least one person saying of it, 'Great! The best story you've ever printed!' but of course some have had more of that kind of comment than others.

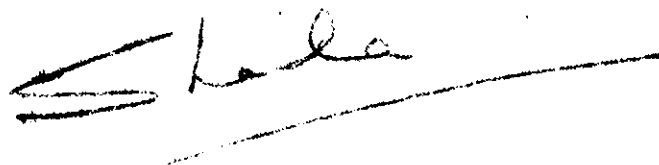
One such story is Janet's 'Ara' - but in spite of numerous letters praising it, Janet still remains firmly convinced that she can't write, and she's never tried to do another full-length story. The only other story she's done is her insert scene for Journey to Babel.

Looking down the list of writers, you might be excused for thinking that it's very much a STAG committee issue. This is only because many of the stories in the early Log Entries were by a small group of people - the people comprising the STAG and Alnitah committees. It wasn't till about LE 6 that we started getting more stories in from other contributors - I should say, many more stories.

Repeat Missions 2 will consist of stories from our one-offs Yeti's Footprint and Enterprise Incidents 1 with possibly one or two stories from other sources. For those of you new to our zines, I had better explain that Yeti's Footprint was the result of getting in several very good entries from one of the newsletter competitions, for a story using that title. Repeat Missions 3 will be in the form of a 'Baillie Collected', including the very first Baillie story which was printed in the fiction section of N/L 19, and - we hope - a completely new Baillie story set in his early days in security. It's not really fair putting a new story into what is a reprint zine, but we felt that the series needed it. There are so many of the Baillie stories that RM 4 may also be a Baillie Collected. We haven't really thought beyond that yet, but since we've virtually sold out on all the Log Entries up to #21 (apart from the reprinted #7) that there's plenty material to hand.

I started this page thinking there wasn't much to say... but now I think I've said enough. I hope those of you who have been wanting to read the early Log Entries, especially #1 - #3, enjoy the zine.

July 1979

A handwritten signature, possibly 'Lala', written in dark ink. The signature is stylized with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

P.S. - two weeks after writing the above, I've discovered that we're almost out of LE 7 as well; this last few weeks, they've been going fast.

We will try to keep Repeat Missions in print.

FUN AND GAMES by Margaret Draper

The bridge of the Enterprise was in semi-darkness; only the glowpups of the emergency bridge lighting and a few tell-tales still gleamed faintly. In the command chair, Kirk sat, huddled in a thermo-blanket borrowed from sickbay; a primitive 'candle' burned on the board at his side, its flame steady, for the heating and air-conditioning were reduced to minimum survival levels. Leaning forward, he tapped the ship's intercom button.

"You've made your point, Spock. Engineer Hallam tells me we can't rig up a satisfactory generating system within five hours. We have six dead, ten disabled."

"Indeed, Captain? I had anticipated heavier casualties."

"One of them is Dr. McCoy."

"Excellent!"

"I heard that!" snarled a voice from sickbay. "Are you asking for a punch in the mouth, Spock?"

"No offence intended, Doctor," answered Spock from the sealed-off lower decks. "I was merely considering the drastic blow your loss would be to the Captain's team."

"Oh. That's different," said Dr. McCoy, somewhat mollified. "Well, since I'm a corpse now, can I get back to my work?"

"Sure, Bones. If Spock's left you any power to work with!"

"Essential supplies are of course being maintained, Captain," replied Spock stiffly. "Our orders specified that neither team should endanger any personnel in their attempts to capture the ship. Our emergency generators are also supplying sickbay for the simulation period; we have no casualties, real or imaginary, in our sector."

In rec room 5, Chekov, another 'corpse', stared gloomily at the useless food-dispensers. "Worse than Siberia," he muttered. Picking up a disposable cup, he stumped across to the coffee machine and held it under the spout. Nothing happened. With a muffled remark about Starfleet Command, long-eared Science Officers and field exercises in general, he kicked the machine. A lump of ice plopped into the empty cup.

"All this realism is going to be the death of me! I'm going to go and warm up in Dr. McCoy's morgue. What's the use of being a corpse if you can't live it up a little?"

Back on the bridge, Kirk was thinking furiously. How could he strike back? Technically, Spock had the strength on his side; he and Scotty both knew the ship inside out, and an alphabetical coincidence had put them both in the same team. Maybe he could smoke them out with simulated neorogas in the ventilation ducts? No, that might endanger his own team - and no doubt Spock would have taken precautions against that sort of attack. Could something be done with the electrical circuits of the engines? No, that wouldn't work; they had the auxiliary control room in their territory, and could override or counter almost anything but the destruct sequence itself. Whatever he came up with would have to be more subtle, based on the psychology of his opponent; Spock was sometimes vulnerable to an illogical approach. Perhaps...

Ten minutes later, the emergency sirens were bleating throughout the ship; these of course were not affected by Spock's 'power-out'. The intercom in auxiliary bleeped frantically.

"Spock? Kirk here. There's a fire in sickbay; Bones and Chekov are trapped inside. They haven't answered our call but there's a chance they may be overcome by smoke and are still alive. The door mechanism's fused; we're trying to cut our way in but we daren't hurry in case they're lying close to the wall. But there's an emergency exit on your side..."

"And half a dozen of your men on the other," said Scott's voice. "Captain, you're surely not expecting us to fall for that old trick?"

"Spock," said Kirk desperately, "you've got to believe me. I can't order you to risk your life, but I'm asking you - please..."

But there was no answer.

The fire had been out for almost five minutes by the time the first phaser cut through to the gutted sickbay, and Chekov and McCoy were well on their way to recovery. Kirk could hardly recognise in the dishevelled, smoke-stained figures his normally impeccable senior officers, and McCoy, on regaining consciousness, gave one look at Spock's blackened features and closed his eyes again with a hollow groan.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to see you, Mr. Spock, even if Bones doesn't seem to be. I was afraid you didn't believe me. What made you decide I was telling the truth?"

Spock appeared slightly embarrassed. "My knowledge of your thought patterns, Captain. You realised that there was no logical way to penetrate our defences, so, from my experience of your tactics at chess, I expected an illogical approach would follow. But nothing, surely, could be more unreasonable than to ask me to risk my life rescuing two enemy 'corpses' from an imaginary fire."

"I - don't understand. Surely, if you were expecting - "

"Ach, it wasn't like that at all," said Scotty in disgust. "He just looked at me and said - 'Illogical - but I believe him', and the next thing I knew we were headed for here at warp speed! Just plain intuition..."

"Mr. Scott," Spock out in. "I suggest we take the Doctor and Mr. Chekov along to rec room 7 for recuperation. Some hot coffee, perhaps..."

"Aye, with just a drop of something in it - to revive them," agreed Scott enthusiastically.

Hot coffee! Kirk could almost smell it. Even if he had to admit defeat -

"Er - Mr. Spock - you wouldn't care to take a 'prisoner' along, would you?"

"Delighted, Captain!"

DAYDREAM by T.G.Z.C.

There are so many stars out there;
And each could give life to another world -
A life intelligent.

There are so many worlds out there
That even if I lived a million years
I could not visit all.

There are so many other men
Who dream, like me, of going to the stars;
One day I know they shall.

DOUBT by Ann Looker

Spock tore at his restraints in a frenzy. McCoy watched him calmly. It was working. Soon they would all be themselves again. Moving the breakables from sickbay had been an unnecessary precaution; Spock had himself suggested that it would be safer to restrain him while the drug took effect and had submitted meekly to the treatment.

It had been a harrowing time for all of them, McCoy reflected. The radiation disease which had caused such incredible aging was now under control but it had left them all with grim memories. In fact, the experience would have been traumatic for most Humans but Starfleet personnel were selected for above average resistance to shock. Spock, of course, would in any case be immune from any emotional disturbance.

The Vulcan finally stopped threshing around and lay back quietly on the bed, eyes closed. The change in him was not as drastic as in the others but it was still very noticeable. He looked a good twenty years younger.

McCoy undid the straps and Spock opened his eyes and sat up, rubbing his wrists.

"My compliments, Doctor. I may have been mistaken about your medical skill."

It was quite an admission. McCoy was taken aback.

"Don't overdo it, Spock. You'll be thanking me next."

The Vulcan was at the door. He turned and said seriously, "Surely you understand my gratitude? Do you really need it verbalised?"

McCoy nodded. "We are Human. Remember?"

Spock looked gravely at him. "In that case...thank you."

McCoy grinned. "You're welcome."

"Will that be sufficient, Doctor?"

McCoy resisted the familiar temptation to throw something at the First Officer. Spock raised an eyebrow and left.

Obviously completely back to normal, McCoy thought wryly - too completely back to normal. A Spock chastened by his brush with senility would have been something to see. It had been infuriating that he, Kirk and Scott had been reduced to a trio of bumbling dotards while Spock himself had merely looked elegantly middle-aged. Although Spock himself had claimed that his mental processes had been reduced, it was obvious that, right up to the end, he could still think rings round the rest of them. The competency hearing had shown that - Spock's searing and merciless logic had made them, Kirk especially, look ridiculous. McCoy had felt painfully sorry for Kirk. The Captain had reminded him of a butterfly he had once seen, pinned squirming to a board. At the time he had cursed Spock's efficient cruelty but now he could see quite clearly that the Vulcan had had no alternative. For Spock the whole thing had been a grim duty which he had been forced to perform against his personal inclination. Thinking back, McCoy could remember the weariness in Spock's voice as he had relentlessly backed Kirk into a position where the Captain had convicted himself out of his own mouth. Yes, McCoy reflected again, it had been a most distressing affair all round - thank God it was all over and they were back to normal!

It took him over a week to realise that they weren't back to normal. Something had changed. There was a distinctly strained atmosphere on the bridge whenever he had occasion to go up there.

They finally located its cause in Spock. The Vulcan was not his usual self. He spoke only when spoken to and was completely aloof and withdrawn. McCoy

realised he had been mistaken in ever thinking of the old Spock as taciturn and cold. This was the real thing. The Vulcan had his defences gathered round him like an impermeable shield. After several tries at breaking through to him the bridge crew had given up. Kirk had persisted but had been rebuffed so coldly that even he had retreated, bemused and not a little hurt.

Kirk finally talked it over with McCoy and confessed his bewilderment.

"It's just been happening slowly over the last few days, Bones. I don't know what's wrong but the atmosphere on the bridge is electric! I think the crew have become really frightened of him. Chekov made a minor error today and Spock reprimanded him in a way that made me cringe - it almost reduced Chekov to tears. It's not like Spock to deliberately hurt like that. He was within his rights, of course, but... Do you think he's sick?"

McCoy looked dubious. "He had a check-up when I gave him our miracle youth drug. He was perfectly all right then - physically and temperamentally. I'd swear the drug worked completely and he left me looking and sounding quite his usual self. I thought at the time that he was quiet, but in retrospect, and comparing his behaviour of the last few days I'd say now that he was positively garrulous." He looked serious. "Tell you what, though, he has been off his food - Christine always keeps tabs on him and she noticed straight away."

Kirk added miserably, "He's also avoiding us. He's kept to his quarters all his off-duty time. It can't be pon farr. He knows us too well to get up-tight over that any more. He'd naturally tell us."

"Worries from home, maybe?"

"There's been no personal messages for him - and again, he would never let that sort of thing affect his attitude to us. Many years ago he might have hidden a private worry from us, but now?...No, Bones, It must be something that involves us - otherwise he would confide in us." He looked suspiciously at McCoy. "Have you said anything to him that might have given offence?"

McCoy snorted. "I always say things to him that might give offence. How the hell can I isolate one insult from all the others? I haven't dared insult him since he's gone all broody, though. I don't fancy myself as a candidate for tal-shaya - merciful though it may be! I'm even afraid to suggest that he has another check-up. It's almost an invasion of privacy to talk to him at all these days!"

Kirk shrugged helplessly. "Let's leave it for a while and hope the situation improves of its own accord."

Far from improving, the situation took a dramatic turn for the worse. Kirk received a visitation from a stony-faced Spock who, using a few brief, formal phrases, presented him with a transfer request, already filled out - with meticulous accuracy, as might have been expected.

Kirk was thundestruck. He knew there was some problem but had never thought it would come to this. He stood there, blindly holding the transfer form and trying to shake off the air of unreality. What had happened to Spock? Why did he want to leave? He tried to formulate the questions but the look on the Vulcan's face gave him no encouragement. It was as if everything they had shared, the dangers, the responsibilities, the moments of understanding and affection had ceased to exist. Instinct moved him to beg Spock to stay but one look at that face and the pleading words died on his lips. What was the point of appealing to memories of friendship, of telling Spock how important he was to them? The Vulcan would not be moved by emotional appeals of that nature. Kirk swallowed and kept his voice carefully ~~steady~~ and neutral.

"I'm sorry you wish to leave us, Mr. Spock - also curious as to your motives."

Spock's voice was mechanical and he answered with rote-like precision.

"My reasons are personal ones. Not to be discussed."

"Very well. I will consider this."

"You have no valid reason for refusing to pass my request on to Starfleet, Captain. I wish to leave as soon as possible."

Kirk was beginning to get angry. He slapped the form down on the desk.

"Nevertheless, I will consider this for a while. I may remind you that you are still under my command. You are ordered to report to sickbay immediately for a full medical examination."

It was all Kirk could do to keep from breaking down in front of the Vulcan - but he knew the scene had to be played out with some dignity. He realised that his voice and words were unaccustomedly harsh, both because he was himself hurt and angry and also because the harshness made it easier to cover up the turmoil and pain inside him.

Spock said nothing - just looked at Kirk with implacable eyes.

"That will be all, Mr. Spock." Kirk didn't recognise the voice as his own. Could this really be him, curtly dismissing from his life the best friend he had ever had - and was ever likely to have?

Spock hesitated slightly. For a moment Kirk thought he was going to say something. Then the moment passed and the Vulcan wheeled and left the room.

For a long time Kirk seemed to sit there, mesmerised by the sight of the form on his desk. Numbly he reached for the intercom and told McCoy what had happened.

"Give him a thorough going over, Bones. If there is a medical reason for all this I want it pinpointed."

"Jim...I...I can't believe it." He paused, choked. "What did you say to him?"

"Not much. What could I say? I was stunned. I just took the form."

"Did you try to get through to him?"

"No. I could tell it would have been no good. You should have seen his face."

"You should have tried, Jim."

Kirk sighed audibly. "I know. I was afraid of becoming over-emotional. I don't know what's wrong with him but I don't want him to despise us any more than he already does. . My damnable pride... I could weep," he finished ruefully.

Kirk switched out and McCoy began to calibrate his equipment to Vulcan settings. The dazed feeling persisted and he had to keep reminding himself that this was for real. He had known that some day they would probably break up but had never thought beyond promotion or death. To voluntarily sever a deep and rewarding relationship such as theirs had been was unthinkable and yet Spock was doing just that - and without a word of explanation.

He heard the door open and turned as the Vulcan entered. Without a word, Spock marched to the examination table and lay down - none of the familiar cracks about McCoy's medical skill or the over-frequency of his checkups. McCoy conducted the examination in silence. There was, as he suspected, nothing wrong with Spock. It was McCoy himself who ended up feeling sick. His stomach wouldn't straighten itself out and there was a lump in his throat that threatened to choke him. But he could see why Kirk had not attempted to get through to the Vulcan. Spock's deflector shields were fully up and he obviously had himself under icy control. McCoy tried in vain to match his air of indifference.

"You've lost too much weight, Mr. Spock. But apart from that you're perfectly fit."

Spock made no comment and started to rise. McCoy looked at him and quailed inwardly, but he knew something had to be said. Besides there was this nagging doubt inside him that would haunt him for the rest of his life unless he spoke now.

"Spock...I..." He saw Spock's face get even colder but steeled himself to go on. "Look...I've said things to you in the past. I thought you knew I didn't mean them. I'm sorry if I've offended you. I never dreamed... I don't want you to leave this ship because of me. I'd prefer to leave myself. It would be easier for me to adapt to another ship than it's going to be for you."

Spock still said nothing but moved to sit up. Something snapped inside McCoy and he found himself shaking - actually shaking - the Vulcan. He couldn't remember ever feeling so hurt and angry. He half expected to be smashed against the bulkhead at any minute... even that would be better than no reaction at all. Still with his hands on Spock's shoulders McCoy went on implacably. "Have you thought about what it's going to be like for you? Do you remember those early days with us? The loneliness! The distrust! Remember Stiles? Even me, Scotty and the others. Remember the Tholian affair? The things I said to you then. And the other time when we lost Jim for months and you failed to deflect the asteroid. Remember how we blamed you then? How we allowed you to blame yourself?" McCoy realised he was shouting and still shaking Spock. He lowered his voice and his hands and looked away helplessly. It was no good. He heard himself muttering brokenly, "How can you bear to go through all that again? I can't...we can't... let you. And us...how can we bear it if you go? How can you leave Jim like this? It will break him. He has trusted you and tried to understand you from the start ...even in the bad old days when the rest of us couldn't see past..." He broke off in horror. Spock's face had twisted at his last words and he seemed to be fighting real distress. McCoy impulsively put his arm round the Vulcan's shoulders and found himself murmuring soothing words. "Try to tell me, Spock. We'll sort something out. It's just got to be a misunderstanding...I've said I'm sorry. It's years since I've deliberately tried to hurt you."

He felt Spock tremble convulsively and a wave of compassion swept through him as he realised the depth of the distress which the Vulcan had been bottling up for the past weeks. Very gently, he laid Spock back on the couch.

"I'll leave you for a few moments. Don't try to get up. Just rest and relax. You want to tell me, don't you?"

Spock nodded wordlessly. McCoy tactfully left him.

When the doctor returned some minutes later he was bearing a large bottle of brandy and two glasses. Spock had not moved, but he had himself under control again - but, McCoy noted with relief, it was not the brittle control of the past weeks. The Vulcan just looked weary and curiously defenceless.

"Better?" McCoy said softly.

Spock's voice seemed to have temporarily deserted him. He nodded again and sat up. McCoy poured two very large brandies and passed one along to the First Officer who, to his amazement, downed it in one and passed the glass back for a refill.

"The trouble with you, Spock," McCoy murmured easily as he poured out the drink, "is that you constantly forget you're half-Human. All this repression will be the death of you! Problems are better shared. Even if I can't help you, you'll be happier after you've told me."

Spock found his voice at last. "I know. But I find it...difficult to talk about personal matters."

McCoy passed him another enormous drink. "I understand. Take your time."

They drank in companionable silence for a while. McCoy could feel the brandy warming him and his own stomach unknotting. He wondered what it was doing to Spock. Spock was halfway through his fourth drink before he spoke - very softly, almost as if to himself.

"You were quite wrong, you know, Doctor. You are not to blame for all this ... Your apology was unnecessary. I do not take offence where none is meant - and it's years since you and I actually meant the things we say to each other. I never take you seriously these days."

"Thanks a lot," McCoy put in drily.

"I also say things to you that I do not mean," Spock went on smoothly. "Vulcans always mean what they say, but you seem to bring out the Human in me."

McCoy grinned in spite of himself. Spock drained his glass and reached again for the bottle. Dutch courage, McCoy thought wanly - screwing himself up to the sticking point.

"It's the Captain," he continued at last, almost inaudibly. "He doesn't trust my motives. He...he thinks I do the right things for the wrong reasons."

McCoy almost laughed aloud in relief. - A tragic misunderstanding but one that Kirk himself should be able to correct. Where on earth had Spock got the ridiculous idea that Kirk didn't trust him?"

"Spock," he said gently, "you are mistaken, you know. I just don't understand how you came to believe such a thing."

"I am not mistaken." Spock's voice was raw. "I only wish I were. He told me so himself."

"When? And what exactly did he say?"

It was obviously painful for Spock to talk about the incident. He spoke haltingly and with an unaccustomed slur in his voice that McCoy recognised as the effects of the brandy.

"After the...competency hearing...when I went to tell him the...decision. He was not...himself. He accused me of betraying him...to get command...said I've always wanted...command...told me he never wanted to have to see me again."

"You've admitted he was not himself, Spock. We none of us were. He didn't mean a word of that."

"So I thought...at the time. I expected an apology after...when we were cured. I waited, but..."

McCoy began to see clearly what Spock had been going through. No wonder he had retreated behind a barrier of icy reserve and indifference. In the past Spock had given more of himself than they had the right to ask any Vulcan to give. As well as his loyalty to duty he had offered them his personal trust and devotion. It was as if he had made a gift of his most cherished possession and had it thrown back in his face.

"Spock, has it occurred to you that Jim may not remember what he said at that time?"

"Yes, Doctor. But I believe that's wishful thinking. I remember everything that happened to me while I was infected and I'm sure that you and Mr. Scott do as well. It is most unlikely that the Captain has really forgotten."

"Spock, how can you definitely say that you have not forgotten anything? If you had forgotten, you could not logically remember forgetting - if you see what I mean. Besides, even if he has remembered, he probably attached no importance to it - I'll bet he reckoned you wouldn't take it seriously. It was such a ridiculous thing for him to say. He's probably assumed that you realised how nonsensical it was."

"Doctor, unlike you, the Captain has always meant the things he said to me. Besides, if he didn't mean it, he could have said so with a simple apology."

McCoy felt as if he were wading through treacle. He knew Kirk cared, but ...how to explain it to a Spock who refused to be reassured?

"Spock," he went on at last. "Only the other day you accused me of wanting

thanks. You said I should have taken your gratitude for granted." He paused. "Admittedly, we Humans need the reassurance of words, but I thought Vulcans were self-sufficient. I think Jim expects you to know that he didn't mean those things and to take his apology for granted. Perhaps he's a bit embarrassed at the whole affair and is subconsciously trying to forget what he said." He watched Spock pour himself another drink and went on. "We've talked about your recent behaviour and he's been concerned and upset. I'll swear he has no idea that he himself is the cause. He was almost weeping when he told me you'd put in for transfer."

Spock had been gazing thoughtfully into his sixth treble brandy - but at McCoy's last words he suddenly looked up. "But...he didn't even ask me to stay, Bones. One word and I would have torn up that form."

"Spock, you just don't understand Humans. He was afraid of breaking down and embarrassing you. He thought an emotional appeal would just drive you further into your shell. You know," he added softly, "you've been very unapproachable these last weeks. We'd begun to be almost afraid of you."

Spock's Vulcan half must have been almost submerged in the brandy. He looked at McCoy and the doctor saw the naked misery in his eyes. He was all Human now - and somewhat the worse for drink. "I'm sorry," he said raggedly. "I've been so wretched myself...I've been taking it out on the crew. Trying to deny that I...cared just seemed to make it worse."

He suddenly dropped his head into his hands. The sight of Spock's all too Human despair moved McCoy as nothing else could have done. All this anguish for a simple misunderstanding!

"Spock...don't...I'll see Jim. Let him tell you himself."

Spock's voice was husky and his voice slurred. "No, I do not want him to feel obliged to apologise just to make me feel better. His pity is not what I need... I don't want him to see me like...this." He raised his head and McCoy saw him compose his face with an effort. "Doctor, I seem to be slightly drunk, I would appreciate it if you were to forget this interview." He rose unsteadily and leaned against McCoy. "If you would be so kind as to assist me to my..."

McCoy saw his eyes glaze over and just managed to steer him towards a bed before he collapsed.

"My paralytic Vulcan friend," thought McCoy kindly, as he bent to remove Spock's boots. "If Scotty could see you now...he'd never believe it!"

In deference to Spock's wishes McCoy said nothing to Kirk beyond admitting that he was keeping the Vulcan in sickbay overnight. He had said, quite truthfully, that although there was nothing organically wrong, Spock's sudden loss of appetite and signs of strain warranted further investigation.

In the morning Kirk had wanted to come down and see his First Officer, but McCoy had advised against it. Anyway, he had said, Spock was asleep and under mild sedation. Which, he reflected to himself, was also true in a way! He had always wondered if Vulcans got drunk, and if so, whether they suffered from hangovers. He already knew half the answer and was about to discover the answer to the rest!

Spock stirred, opened his eyes, groaned and promptly shut them again.

"Another refreshing sign of humanity, Mr. Spock," said McCoy brightly, "known, in the vernacular, as a hangover."

"I am well aware of the terminology, Doctor." The Vulcan sat up and shuddered. "It is only the experience itself that is new to me." He shut his eyes again. "I knew there was a logical reason for abstention."

"Well, Spock, what's it to be? Vulcan pain control or Human headache pills?"

Spock grimaced. "I've had enough of being Human for the moment, Doctor. If you will be patient..." He lay back for a few minutes then opened his eyes again.

"I'm all right now."

He was already out of bed and pulling on his boots. He seemed very much his usual self.

"Spock...?" McCoy began but Spock himself broke in.

"Doctor... I made a fool of myself last night. My apologies." He hesitated. "I cannot remember exactly what I said towards the end of the evening but I know I was not in control. You will not repeat what I said?"

"Of course not. Anyway, you said nothing to be ashamed of, Spock."

"Thank you. Doctor, there is something I need to ask you."

McCoy hid his surprise. "Go on."

"When I made the decision to seek a transfer I thought I was being logical. If the Captain really does mistrust my motives then it is logical that I should go, for the good of us all - and the ship. I was convinced in my own mind that it was so." He hesitated and looked somewhat shamefacedly at McCoy. "Now I'm not so sure. My own behaviour last night made me realise just how deeply I had let emotional considerations rule me. Besides, your arguments cast some doubts in my mind." He looked closely at McCoy and spoke very steadily. "Doctor, I no longer think I am capable of making a rational decision whether to go or stay. My natural inclination to stay may be a purely emotional one. You must be completely honest with me - no white lies, please. Do you really believe I have misjudged the Captain?"

McCoy met Spock's eyes squarely. "Yes, I do. Without any doubt."

Spock relaxed visibly. "In that case I shall withdraw my request for a transfer. I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time unnecessarily, Doctor."

"My job, Spock. And it was not unnecessary. Anyway, it was an interesting case-study. I was not aware that Vulcans could get so uptight."

"Neither was I, Doctor," was the devastating reply.

Kirk had had a ghastly night. When he awoke from a feverish and disturbed sleep he was quite prepared to dismiss the whole business as a product of nightmare. But the transfer form, still lying where he had thrown it on the desk, brought him down to reality with a lurch. He knew that if Spock really wanted out he would have to send the request to Starfleet. All he could hope for lay in delaying tactics. Once the message was sent the whole matter was out of his hands - and irrevocable. He carefully filed away the document, wishing it was a case of 'out of sight, out of mind'. He was still staring blankly at the wall when his buzzer sounded and, in answer to his summons, Spock entered.

The Vulcan's eyes went immediately to the desk. "Captain," he began without preamble, "have you taken any action regarding my request for a transfer?"

Kirk looked at him, hoping to see a chink in the armour - some way of getting through to him. Spock still looked tense and tight-lipped but some of the icy coldness had gone from his face. Perhaps there was hope...

"Spock, I - "

"Captain, please give me a straight answer. Have you or have you not contacted Starfleet?"

The worries of the past weeks and last night exploded inside Kirk.

"NO I HAVE NOT! And I'm not going to either until I know the reason for this crazy, damnfool behaviour of yours... Of all the ridiculous, pig-headed, lunatic notions I've ever heard of. You've been driving us near mad with worry for a fortnight...then this..."

He tore open the file, grabbed the transfer form and ripped it into fragments. The pieces fluttered to the desk.

Kirk, hot with a mixture of anger and shame turned away from the Vulcan's gaze.

The icy retort he expected never came.

"Thank you, Captain," Spock said coolly. "You've saved me the trouble of doing that myself. I came to withdraw my request. Please forget the whole matter." He saw Kirk's mouth open in amazement and quickly interposed, "No questions, Jim - please."

Kirk nodded, speechless. He swallowed. "Spock, will you at least allow me to say I'm glad?"

"I can see that, Captain." He paused, obviously searching for words. "I ...I made a mistake, that's all."

"That'll all!" The tensions and worry that had been building up inside Kirk for the past weeks could be denied no longer. "Spock - just in case you ever make another mistake - I couldn't go through this again... Last night was horrific. I know you hate emotional scenes and I will probably embarrass you but there are some things I must say. I thought I would never have to say them; I thought you knew how much I value you. Then it struck me last night that I do tend to take you a lot for granted, that I sometimes use you unmercifully."

Spock made as if to stop him but Kirk was in full spate now and babbled on regardless. "For example, the things I said to you the other week, after the competency hearing." Kirk had averted his face as he dug into the shameful memory so he didn't see Spock flinch as if stung nor note the involuntary tightening of his jaw muscles. He went on distractedly. "I used you then. I was hurt myself and I wanted to hurt someone in turn. It didn't matter who. You were just...there. I'm not sure whether you even remember the incident... You wouldn't have taken me seriously anyway - we were both ill at the time. I'd almost forgotten it myself. But last night, when I thought you were leaving, I went over everything in my mind - thought of all the things I'd left unsaid... I've never told you that you are as close to me as a brother - closer than my real brother ever was. I trust you more than I trust myself, sometimes...I..."

He trailed off in embarrassment, realising how much he had said and wondering if Spock could ever forgive him for such an unseemly display of emotion. The silence was ominous. He could imagine the contempt with which Spock would view his outburst, and dreaded what he would see in the Vulcan's face if he turned round.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I shouldn't have gone on like that, but last night I promised myself that if you should, by a miracle, change your mind, I would say those things - once and for all."

The silence stretched to screaming point. Kirk knew he had gone too far. He had only made matters worse by gabbling on so inanely. He forced himself to turn and faced his First Officer.

Spock's face was a rigid mask, his expression unreadable. He knew Kirk had not found it easy to speak such words to him. His doubts seemed so foolish now. But what could he say? He had managed to tell McCoy...but had been three parts drunk at the time. To speak now...in cold blood? Yet if he did not speak, Kirk would imagine that his protestations of affection had fallen on stony ground. The Captain was obviously ashamed and embarrassed by his outburst and would never know how much his words had meant to Spock. Besides, Kirk had asked for reassurance that Spock would never again alienate himself from them. Spock did not see how he could give such reassurance without a full explanation of his recent behaviour.

Kirk was looking at him now. Spock knew his own face gave no indication of the indecision he felt, of the conflicts within him; to match confidence

with confidence - or to silently accept Kirk's friendship and hope that the Captain would understand his own feelings. No-one could have been more aware than Spock himself of the basic illogic of his position. To reject facts was always illogical. His affection for Jim Kirk was a fact he had long since admitted to himself even while he continued to cloak his feelings in rationalisations. It was illogical to pretend that by shutting one's eyes to an unpalatable fact one could make that fact go away. It was with him now...inescapable...a burden of affection that he was so used to denying that such denial had become automatic.

But Kirk deserved better.

At last the Vulcan spoke, hesitantly and with none of his usual precision. "Forgive my silence. It is just that I don't know what to say. No-one has ever before spoken such words to me." He sat down facing Kirk.

"You are not...offended?" Kirk hardly dared hope.

"No - on the contrary - I am honoured."

Kirk let out the breath he had not been aware he had been holding.

Spock went on more firmly. "Captain, I think you should know the reason for my recent behaviour, but..."

"Spock. If you do not wish to talk about it I will understand and accept the fact. I just hope it will never happen again - whatever it was."

"No.. You have been honest with me. I must..." There was an awkward pause. When he began to speak again his voice was perfectly steady and emotionless.

"Captain. I had come to believe that you no longer trusted me. The things that you said after the competency hearing sowed the seeds of doubt in my mind. Hence the transfer request. I thought you meant what you said...I know better now," he concluded simply.

Kirk stared at him in open amazement. "It mattered that much?"

Spock nodded dumbly. He clasped his hands together to steady himself. In a sudden, impulsive gesture Kirk leaned forward and grasped his First Officer's hands between his own.

"Spock. I...I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."

"I already have, Jim."

The silence between them was different this time. Everything had been said. Finally Spock stood up to go. Kirk accompanied him to the door. He laid a detaining hand on the Vulcan's sleeve.

"Mr. Spock, one thing still puzzles me. Why did you withdraw your transfer request? It couldn't have been anything I said to you; you had obviously decided to stay before you came to see me this morning."

"Call it sorcery, Captain. I consulted Dr. McCoy."

"Your friendly neighbourhood witch-doctor, eh, Spock? I'd be interested to know what spells and potions he employed."

"I don't know about the spells, Captain, but from the state of my head, I would judge the potion to be at least ninety percent proof!"

Kirk raised an eyebrow. Spock smiled. Then the door between them hissed shut.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Why are you so bright?
Do you burn petroleum,
Or is it electric light?

...PERCHANCE TO DREAM by Sheila Clark

Captain James T. Kirk did not particularly like Ensign Rev Harbi...and he did not know why.

It worried him.

Harbi had only joined the Enterprise a few days previously; he was courteous, obedient, efficient, punctual, tidy...there was nothing, nothing at all, that Kirk could put a finger on and say, "This is what's wrong."

Kirk had shipped annoying crewmen before this; men who had been less than fully competent, or who were lazy or careless - he usually managed to get rid of them fairly quickly - but he had never shipped one that he had completely disliked - until now. And there was no obvious reason why he should dislike the Dorian. The being was, perhaps, a little more extrovert than Kirk, personally, appreciated, but that was no reason to dislike him...nor was it any comfort to Kirk to learn that no-one in the crew liked Harbi. Not that he was actively disliked; he just wasn't liked. And that in itself was odd, too; every Dorian Kirk had ever known had been popular, liked by everybody aboard ship, without exception.

Kirk found himself wanting to punish - or at least reprimand - Harbi for any and every minor thing that he did; things that he would overlook in anyone else, at least until the new crewman found his feet and learned Kirk's ways. Realising this, Kirk was deliberately lenient with the Dorian, even when Spock mentioned to him that several of the crew had complained about the Dorian Service Medallion that Harbi wore.

This medallion had been annoying Kirk too, but knowing as he did how proud the Dorians were of their medallions, he had deliberately waited, hoping that once Harbi got over the first raptures of being entitled to one, he would wear it inside his shirt, as all the other Dorians Kirk had ever served with had done. The trouble with the medallion was that because the Dorians' optic system was different from the Human one, what they considered a thing of beauty was, to Humans, highly, very highly, psychedelic, and visually very disturbing, causing a condition that in extreme cases led to dizziness and loss of balance.

"Even I find Mr. Harbi's medallion disturbing," Spock said, having delivered the general complaint.

"I know," Kirk said. "I keep wanting to drag it off his neck. The trouble is, the thing's a status symbol."

"So I have heard," Spock commented. "But I have never before served with a Dorian. In what way is it significant?"

"Well, you know the Dorian system," Kirk replied. "Gravity only 85% of Earth normal. By Terran standards, Dorians are mostly far too weak to meet the physical requirements of Starfleet. The handful who are strong enough to get through a physical and eventually get onto a ship...they're regarded as something special. Once they're assigned to a ship, they get a Service Medallion from their government. This is Harbi's first assignment, so he's only just got his medallion. Of course he wants to show it off. I can understand that. But understanding doesn't make it any easier to live with. I probably would have spoken to him about it days ago, only I was scared of picking on him..."

Spock nodded. "I understand how you feel," he said, surprising Kirk considerably. "I do not like him - I find I am continually wanting to correct him unnecessarily, so much so that when I do have reason to correct him, I am reluctant to do so."

"I'm glad I'm not the only one," Kirk commented drily. "But I think I'll have to speak to Harbi now that there are complaints."

He sent for the Dorian, and when Harbi reported to him, he merely pointed out that since most of the crew were Humans, and Humans found the medallion disturbing,

it would be more courteous to his crewmates if he wore his medallion under his shirt, where most of his race did.

Harbi agreed to do this; but within twenty-four hours the complaints had started again. Harbi was again wearing his medallion in full view.

This time McCoy came to Kirk. "Jim, that medallion of Harbi's has got to go," he said. "Half of the crew are suffering from general dizziness and lack of concentration because of the crazy colour pattern on it. Even Spock's affected. And I couldn't give him a proper physical because of it. I kept seeing double. If you can't persuade him to keep it out of sight you'll have to confiscate it."

"I don't want to do anything that drastic," Kirk began reluctantly - more so because it was what he wanted to do.

"It's that or have no-one on the ship apart from Harbi working at full efficiency. The ones who aren't affected yet aren't affected simply because they haven't come into contact with Harbi yet. But they soon will. And as soon as they do... No, Jim, you'll have to stop him wearing it, and if the only way is to confiscate it..."

"I suppose you're right," Kirk said unhappily. "But he's going to feel that I'm picking on him. And he'll be right."

"You're not, Jim. You gave him a chance. He didn't take it. You have the rest of the crew to consider... Jim, if you liked him, would you hesitate?"

"No, I don't suppose I would... All right, Bones. I'll order him to stop wearing it, and warn him that if he disobeys this time, I'll confiscate it. I hope I don't have to."

The warning was sufficient, however. Harbi stopped wearing the medallion, at least where it could be seen, but Kirk sensed that the Dorian was resentful. On the surface he was still the same courteous, efficient, obedient officer; on the surface, there was no sign that Harbi knew he was disliked, especially by his Captain; but Kirk felt sure that he knew...and returned the dislike with outright hatred.

It would have afforded him no gratification to know that he was right.

Kirk was definitely right.

Harbi did not like the Captain. But then, Harbi didn't like anyone.

He had always been regarded as unusual on Dor; he had grown up knowing that everyone expected him to join Starfleet Command because he was so big and strong; he was pleased that he was big enough and strong enough to be accepted - yet paradoxically he resented it, resented the assumption that so many of his race made, his family among them, that only the big and strong Dorians should be of value to the Federation. (No-one else in the Federation made this assumption; there were many things Dor produced that the Federation valued, and there had been great advances in the treatment of psychiatric illnesses since Dor joined the Federation because of them. Only the Dorians themselves underestimated the many benefits they had given to the other races who were allied to them.)

No, Harbi didn't like anyone - his defiance in continuing to wear the medallion, the one disobedience he had allowed himself, and that only because it hadn't been a direct order, had been symbolic of it - but Kirk he now hated, as the symbol of the detested Federation that decreed that his younger brother, who would have given anything to be entitled to wear the medallion but who was too slightly built to pass the preliminary medical examination, should be useless to the Federation. He himself didn't want the hated symbol of strength, but he found he bitterly resented not being allowed to show it off.

He began to wonder how he could be revenged on Kirk...and suddenly realised that he had an innate weapon that he could use, without anyone being any the

wiser. The fact that Kirk himself wouldn't know who was causing him distress didn't matter; all that mattered was the fact of being able to distress Kirk - and gain personal pleasure at the same time.

For Dorians were unique in that they had developed from a parasitic life-form. They had existed on the emotions of the other life-forms on Dor, preferring the more pleasant emotions, and had developed intelligence as they sought to cause pleasant emotions in their hosts. Although Kirk didn't know it, it was one reason why all the other Dorians he had known had been so well liked; they had provided a telepathic aura of happiness, which had provided them with feedback to satisfy their now rudimentary parasitic cravings. No-one suffered, everyone was happy, and no-one was any the wiser. It was also the reason why Dorian treatment for psychiatric disorders was so successful; but they had never seen any reason to mention their ability to the Federation.

But Harbi was not a normal Dorian.

Unlike most of his fellows, Harbi was capable of resentment.

Harbi was a throwback - and a throwback of the worst kind. The emotion he preferred to feel in others was unhappiness. The aura he projected was one of dislike. For a parasite it was anti-survival, and most of his kind had died out long before the race had gained intelligence. It was rarely that a Dorian like Harbi was born.

On Dor, he had been cunning enough to hide his aberration; here, he saw no need to. And since it was a telepathic condition, it didn't show up on any of his personality profiles. Since he came on board, he had been feasting on dislike, unhappiness and disorientation. And he had now been forbidden to wear the medallion that had given him much parasitic food - a double reason for resentment.

But he could replace what he had lost, from Kirk. He could make Kirk miserable.

He watched the Captain carefully for several days before insinuating a parasitic thread of thought into Kirk's mind. He saw Kirk's deep affection for Spock and McCoy; and decided that he could cause Kirk great distress if he could somehow alienate him from them...preferably one at a time. And he would feed fat from that distress.

He knew the theory of the ancient technique, no longer commonly used - no longer considered necessary - of causing dreams in the host; and began to experiment with that technique.

He probed Kirk's memories carefully, searching for one that he could use. He knew he couldn't create dreams for Kirk - not yet. He had to gain experience in controlling his host's mind first, and the way to do that was to take memories and manipulate them.

The surface memories were all pleasant ones, and Harbi's nose wrinkled as he experienced them, finding them sickly to his depraved tastes. Memories of laughter, of friendship; memories of assistance in times of danger; memories of a look or a word or even a touch exchanged, a rapport greater than even Harbi's parasitic mind could appreciate. And worst of all to Harbi's warped mind was love...Kirk's love for his friends, his certainty that they loved him in return - even the Vulcan from whom Harbi had been able to obtain very little reaction.

There was nothing that he could use! Even the more unpleasant memories were smothered in a thick layer of suffocating gratitude for help received...

Wait, though...wait...could he use some of them? There was one...the help given had been so little...could he use it? He probed the memory, absorbing all the details...

Then recalled it to Kirk's sleeping consciousness that night. He watched, standing in the background of Kirk's mind, absorbing Kirk's emotions...

It was a beautiful planet. Gravity, temperature, atmosphere, all perfect,

with no seasonal fluctuations anywhere - eternal summer. Then a flower, a beautiful large flower, fired a cluster of darts at one of the landing party, and he fell dead. McCoy bent over him...he could do nothing. Kirk glanced round. There were more of the flowers...but none near enough to do any damage. Then Spock came up behind him - and deliberately pushed him towards one of the flowers. Still off-balance he tried to get away from it, and failed. He felt the darts hit him, like so many stabs of fire, and fell, unable to move, unable to speak... Still conscious, he heard McCoy say, "He's dead", and Spock's reply, a mocking, "We're well rid of him". McCoy laughed too; and they walked away together and left him lying there, still alive but unable to show it... Long tendrils snaked out from the plant then, fastening themselves round him...he felt them sucking the blood from him, pulling tiny pieces of flesh from him and knew that the flower, so beautiful to look at, was eating him alive... He threshed about, trying to get away from it, but knowing that for all his efforts he wasn't moving an inch...

Full-fed, Harbi allowed the dream, an amalgam of an actual experience and a preliminary attempt at actual dream creation, to fade, but remained watching, probing for another memory he could use, another memory he could manipulate as easily... Odd that it had been so easy after all, but of course it had been a simple memory, nothing complicated... Ah, there was another one...

The survivors of the escaping band of genetic giants faced the crew of the Enterprise, who had proved unable to stop them.

"You can join us," Khan said. "We need servants...as our slaves, you will be permitted to live... But you, Mr. Spock - we would be glad to have you join with us as an equal. You are our equal, much superior to these puny creatures that Earthmen have become since they overthrew us by their treachery. Will you join us?"

"Yes," Spock said clearly. "You are by far a better leader than Kirk... You do not want Kirk, Khan. Let me have the pleasure of destroying him. Otherwise, you will be eternally in danger from his trickery."

"Do what you will with him," Khan said. "He is yours."

Spock gripped his arm and dragged him out. Once outside, Kirk said, "That was a good act, Spock."

"Act?" Spock said mockingly. "It was no act, Kirk. Khan is your superior. I serve him now." He opened the door of the decompression chamber and forced Kirk in. The door slammed shut; the air pressure began to decrease... Kirk gasped for breath...gasped...gasped...and everything became black...

He opened his eyes to find himself in a space-suit, drifting in empty space. Where?... Nearby he could see the Enterprise. He struggled to reach her, trying to swim through the vacuum of space, and finding that he could. He only had air for such a little while now... He had to get to the Enterprise...

He reached out to touch the ship, and found that his hand went through her. He pushed his way through the hull, and moved down the corridor.

The bridge... He had to get to the bridge...and he was there, on the bridge, with no idea of how he got there. Spock was sitting in the command chair, McCoy at his side, and Scotty nearby.

They saw him, stared at him. He tried to call to them for help; Spock shook his head. "No, gentlemen, Kirk is dead. That is only a ghost. Forget about him. He is dead. Lost with the Defiant."

Desperately he tried to speak to Spock, to beg for the help that a corner of his mind knew Spock should give him, but he had not the breath to do it. He gasped for breath again, feeling his senses going, sinking into blackness...

He jerked into wakefulness, and sat up sharply. He looked around the familiar cabin and drew a deep, thankful breath. Only a dream... No, three dreams, but so vivid - and so wrong, so terribly wrong. Why had his subconscious mind

insisted on having Spock betray him, when he knew Spock had saved him each of those times? Deliberately, he thought over the actual incidents about which he had dreamed. Spock had pushed him away from the flower, taking the darts himself; Spock had risked everything to retrieve him alive; Spock had not sided with Khan but had defied him...

/He was worming his way into your confidence,/ a thought said, deep inside his head. /He wanted you to learn to trust him...so that he could betray you later./

"No!" he gasped aloud.

To distract himself, he glanced at the chronometer. Time to get up, to return to duty... He yawned, still sleepy, but hauled himself out of bed.

He found himself watching Spock cautiously from time to time during the day, and each time he forced his eyes away. He trusted Spock...of course he did! A few bad dreams couldn't alter that...if only that treacherous little thread of thought would stop remembering the mockery in Spock's voice during the dreams...

He went to bed early that night, hoping for a good sleep to make up for the lack of rest the night before. Harbi watched as he settled down.

He fell asleep quickly; he was very tired.

Which memory tonight? Harbi thought. That one? or that?...

Gary Mitchell's eyes gleamed silver as he looked at Kirk. "You always wanted me to think, didn't you, James? Well, I'm thinking now. You can't stop me, James; I'm stronger than you...you should be kneeling before me. I should be the Captain, not you..."

Spock moved into the line of Kirk's sight. He walked over to Mitchell's side. Then he turned to face Kirk.

His eyes also were gleaming silver!

"We're taking over this ship, Kirk," he said. "We're the rulers of the galaxy. We're stronger than any of you puny Earthmen... You wanted to leave us stranded on Delta Vega. But it's you who will be stranded there, Kirk, you and the rest of the weak insects that we could crush under our feet. We could survive down there; how long will you live?" And he laughed scornfully.

Somehow, without any transition, Kirk found himself on the surface of Delta Vega, several of the crew at his side. Facing him were Mitchell, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, all with their eyes gleaming unrecognisably. Then they were gone. They had been his friends, and they were gone...leaving him and the handful of the crew who had not been affected by the barrier to die a lingering death from starvation... He looked round the near-barren planet, seeing plants sprout miraculously; he glanced towards his crew - and found that they had mostly disappeared. Only one or two, all carrying tricorders, were left.

"Jimmy, boy!"

He whirled to face the remembered, the hated, voice. "Finnegan!"

"Do you think you can survive here now, Jimmy boy? You have to beat me first, you know - and you can't beat me, Jimmy. You never could. You never will."

Kirk lunged forward, wanting to batter Finnegan into unconsciousness, irrotated beyond bearing by the detested, gloating voice. He thought he had seen the last of Finnegan when the Irishman left Starfleet Academy; it seemed he had been wrong. And he had never envied the unfortunate Captain who had had to put up with Finnegan in his crew.

Finnegan danced backwards away from Kirk's threatening fists and round behind a rock. As Kirk followed him, he stopped. Finnegan was no longer alone. Spock stood beside him.

Kirk stopped dead. "Spock?"

Finnegan burst out laughing, a horrible mocking laugh that Kirk remembered only too well; it spelt humiliation for him, indicated that once again he had fallen victim to one of Finnegan's tricks; and this time, Spock laughed with him. He turned away, unwilling to let Finnegan see how hurt he was that Spock, Spock whom he had thought he could trust, should laugh with Finnegan at him; and knew that Finnegan was not fooled.

He turned to face a stone wall and whirled again.

Finnegan no longer stood there; Garth did, with Spock at his side. And Spock held an open communicator.

"Spock! No!"

"Yes, Kirk," Spock said coldly. "Lord Garth is the natural leader of the galaxy. He must be allowed to leave here, and take up his rightful place."

Kirk lunged at Spock, trying to stop him. With one hand, almost contemptuously, Spock held him off while he spoke into the communicator. "Spock to Enterprise. Two to beam up."

Scotty's voice spoke. "Queen to Queen's level three."

"Queen to King's level one," Spock said deliberately.

"Scotty! No! No!" Kirk screamed. "No!..."

"You did kill Ben Finney," Spock went on as if none of the previous exchange had happened. "You panicked, Kirk, never gave him a chance to leave the pod. You murdered Finney, Kirk. You murdered him. You murdered him. You murdered him..."

Kirk closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the accusing face. The voice slowly faded into silence; Kirk reopened his eyes.

He was lying on the floor of his cabin. A glance at the chronometer told him it was again morning.

He got to his feet, slowly dressed. He had never felt less like going on duty.

That night, he fought his tiredness, trying to stay awake as long as possible, afraid to sleep in case he dreamed again. He sat at his desk, trying to keep his mind occupied with paperwork, but his eyes drooped shut despite all his attempts to remain wakeful. At last he gave up, and staggered to bed, hoping against hope that this time he'd be tired enough to sleep without dreaming.

He faced Spock, a strip of leather in his hands, wondering how to use this weapon to best advantage. It seemed so unlikely a weapon!... And he didn't want to kill Spock...even though there was killing fury in the Vulcan's eyes. He was half conscious of McCoy at the side, beside T'Pol, watching. Spock lunged, getting the thong round Kirk's throat. He felt it tighten, and struggled for breath, unavailingly. He felt consciousness slip from him; as it did, he heard McCoy saying, "He'd dead. Well done, Spock."

The voice was truly congratulatory; Kirk knew that McCoy was offering a sincere comment. He felt his body being thrown into a pit; and heard the gathered Vulcans, McCoy with them, leaving. They weren't even bothering to take his body back to the Enterprise...

He struggled back to conscious thought to find himself lying on a bed - facing himself! He stared in horror at the face, so familiar from his mirror, as it looked down at him, a vicious expression on his face. Then it left him, and he lay, unable to move because of the restraints that held him.

Spock came in, to look down at him. "Spock! You must help me. I'm Captain Kirk. Janice Lester changed bodies with me..."

Spock's fingers on his face... "I believe you...but I believe we will be better with a change of Captain. She will depend on me more, since she has no experience...and she will not have the delusions of grandeur that you so often have... If you tell anyone that I admitted that you told the truth, I will say you are lying, Dr. Lester."

"I hate you, Captain."

Kirk's attention was drawn from his aching head to Spock's statement. Somewhere in the background Kevin Reilly was singing 'Kathleen' yet again... and still as badly.

So the ailment, whatever it was, had affected Spock too... and now he knew the truth. Spock hated him... He had hidden it cleverly, but the disease had betrayed him... He would know never to trust the Vulcan again.

He closed his eyes in misery, and when he opened them again, it was to look up at the roof of his cabin. It was morning again, and for the third night he had obtained no rest from his night's sleep...

Sitting in the command chair that day, he had a momentary impulse to confide in Spock. Despite the dreams, he still trusted Spock...he did, he told himself.

Inside his mind, Harbi sensed the thought with near panic. He mustn't allow Kirk to confide in anyone...but could he influence Kirk's waking mind? Really influence it, as opposed to putting stray thoughts into it?

/The dreams can't be wrong,/ the thought came subtly. /They can't be wrong. Why have there been so many of them if they are? Spock is just biding his time. He wants to be Captain. He must want to be Captain. If I tell him, he'll tell McCoy and get me declared unfit for duty...maybe even insane...never to command the Enterprise again...and then Spock would be Captain.../

He gave an involuntary shiver at the thought of losing the Enterprise.

"Are you all right, Jim?"

He glanced round. Spock was standing beside him, an expression of some concern on his face.

/It's a trick,/ the thought said. /He wants you to admit to feeling ill so that he can have you removed from duty. He's cunning.../

"I'm perfectly all right, Mr. Spock," Kirk said coldly, formally.

Rebuffed, hurt, Spock retreated into cold formality himself. "Very well, sir. I regret having bothered you unnecessarily." He returned to his station, and gave his attention to his sensors.

Kirk watched him for a moment. /I was right, wasn't I?/ the thought said. /If he had really cared, he wouldn't have gone back to duty so readily. You beat him this time./

From his place at the navigation console, Harbi glanced back at Spock. A new flavour had crept into the parasite's mind...he realised that he was getting some feedback from Spock as well as the now-permanent emotional feast he was getting from Kirk. This was wonderful... He had never been so well-fed, even as a child basking in the love and care of his parents, for that emotional aura had been the sickly-sweet one of affection, and he preferred the bitter one of hatred, fear and distrust, the tart one of hurt.

After Kirk went off duty, however, Spock made his way to sickbay to see McCoy.

"Well, Spock?" the doctor asked airily. "What can I do for you?"

"For me, Doctor, nothing...but I do not think the Captain is feeling well. He is looking tired. He claims to be feeling perfectly all right, but I am not convinced. I think you should give him an examination."

"Are you saying you think he's unfit for duty, Spock?"

"No, Doctor, I would not go so far. I do say that he is not looking well. I think he is tired; unnaturally so. And that unless something is done, he may then become unfit for duty. I think it is better to see to him before that stage is reached."

"I'll go and see him."

McCoy made his way to Kirk's quarters casually, as if he had nothing more important on his mind than a gossip. He pressed the buzzer at the door; and on hearing the invitation to enter, went in.

Kirk looked at him a little suspiciously. "Bones. Did Spock send you here?"

"Spock? Why should he? I just looked in for a chat."

"Oh. Sorry, Bones. I'm a bit edgy..."

"You're looking a bit tired too," McCoy said, privately shocked at how right Spock was.

"Oh, that. I'm not sleeping too well, that's all."

"Any idea why?" McCoy struggled to remain casual, half afraid that Kirk would resent so direct a question. After all, Spock must have asked, to know that Kirk claimed to be feeling all right.

Kirk shook his head. "No, not really. I've had a nightmare or two, that's all."

"Come on, Jim. You're coming to sickbay with me, and I'll give you a check over. Maybe all you need is a tonic."

The checkup proved that Kirk was surprisingly run down, and definitely underslept. McCoy gave him a shot and a couple of pills. "Take those when you go to bed tonight," he said, "and go early to bed. Then I want to see you again in the morning."

Kirk took them and left. He had no intention of taking the pills; he had no intention of going to sleep if he could possibly avoid it. He didn't want to spend another night dreaming about being betrayed by Spock...

He sat at his desk working, forcing his eyes to remain open. Harbi sent him sleep thoughts, but he fought them, not knowing what he fought. Eventually he could fight no longer, and slumped forward over his desk.

Joanna was on board the ship. She and McCoy were avoiding him... Well, he thought, they don't see much of each other... He was walking down the corridor when he heard laughter coming from sickbay. One of the voices was Spock's.

"It's better like this," he was saying. "We don't need Kirk."

We don't need Kirk.

We don't need Kirk.

WE DON'T NEED KIRK.

The voice echoed round and round in his head, the cruel laughter from McCoy and Joanna providing a background to it.

Suddenly Spock was standing before him. He was holding a whip. He struck out at Kirk with it; Kirk dodged and turned to flee. As he did, the lash caught him across the face; across the eyes. He tried to see where he was going, and couldn't...the lash had blinded him.

The ship seemed to have gone now. He was walking on a partly-yielding surface, one that dragged at his feet. He tripped and fell over a rock; he

rolled and came to rest against a larger rock, the impact winding him. He lay for a few moments gasping for breath, then tried to get up. His skin seemed to be adhering to the rock... He pulled himself away, and felt the pain as some of his skin tore away. His shoulder was beginning to ache too; somehow he had damaged it. He tried to move on. It was so hot; he would give anything for a drink. He tried to call out, but his throat was far too dry, and he could only croak. He heard rustling behind him, and turned; the rustling stopped, to be resumed to one side of him a few seconds later. He tried to ignore it, but kept wondering if the animals of this crazy world were as bloodthirsty as he had discovered the plants to be... He tripped and fell again.

Then he heard Spock's voice and knew that the Vulcan was somewhere near.

"Spock!" he croaked, and knew that he'd been heard.

"There's no-one here," Spock said clearly. "We might as well move on. He isn't here."

"Spock!" He tried to call again, but only a hoarse sound came.

Someone caught his arm in an unfriendly grip. "Mhlar spy!"

He was hustled along. Involuntarily he opened his eyes and found that he could see again. He was being forced towards a huge rock. He was made to stand with his back to it while his arms were tied by a rope that went round the back of the rock. Spock was standing there watching.

"Spock!" he cried desperately. Even yet, somehow the instinct to trust the Vulcan had not died completely.

His First Officer smiled cruelly at him, and picked up a bow. He fitted an arrow to it, took aim carefully, and fired.

The arrow pinned one shoulder.

Spock took another arrow, fired it. It pinned the other shoulder.

He took yet another. This one, Kirk was sure, would be through the heart. He closed his eyes. He didn't want to watch Spock killing him...

Nothing happened. He opened his eyes.

He was slumped over his desk, his neck stiff from his uncomfortable position.

He was washing when McCoy came in without buzzing. The doctor took one look at him and said accusingly, "Jim, you didn't take those sleeping pills."

"How did you know?"

"Because if you had, you'd still be out cold. Jim, I didn't give you them for fun. You need a good sleep. Either you promise to take those pills tonight or I come in and sedate you. Now make up your mind which it's to be."

Kirk looked at him from bloodshot eyes. Maybe, he thought, in a drugged sleep I won't have those nightmares. "All right," he said. "I'll take them tonight."

"Did you have another nightmare last night?" McCoy asked. Reluctantly, Kirk nodded.

"Jim, why not get Spock to meld with you, see if he can find out what's causing them?"

"NO!" Kirk rejected the idea with revulsion - Harbi's revulsion. "I'm not having anyone crawling around inside my skull, least of all Spock!"

"But Jim, you've been in mind-meld with Spock before, and you never minded - if you'll excuse the pun."

"Well, I mind now! I won't agree to it."

"All right, Jim, just forget it." He glanced at Kirk. "I think you should stay off duty today, and rest. Try to get some sleep."

"I'm perfectly fit and able to do my job," Kirk answered sharply.

"You're tired out and liable to make a mistake."

"Doctor, are you in league with Spock to declare me unfit?"

McCoy stared at him in amazement. "No," he said, "but if you go on the way you're doing, I will be declaring you unfit, temporarily at least, and I'll keep you in sickbay, under restraint if necessary, until you're fully rested."

He turned and left without another word. Kirk stared after him, aware that he had hurt McCoy by his attitude, not fully understanding his own behaviour himself.

In a corner of his mind, Harbi smiled, savouring the flavour of McCoy's hurt. It had a different taste to Spock's, for it was mixed with anger... delicious!

Somehow Kirk got through the day. He was desperately sleepy, and there was a terrible temptation to take the pills as he had promised and go to bed. Harbi was feeling hungry - the gluttonous hunger of the compulsive eater. Harbi had rapidly become addicted to the parasitism he had never dared indulge before. He projected sleep thoughts at Kirk. Sleep...sleep...

Kirk fought the temptation until mid-evening, ship's time; then he took the pills and lay down.

The pills weren't working! He had never been so wide awake. Restlessly, he got up again and made his way to the bridge. They were near Romulan space; soon it would be time to enter it in obedience to Starfleet's sealed order. They had to discover the secret of the Romulan cloaking device.

Yes; there was the Romulan ship.

"You will beam over, Captain, with your First Officer."

The woman commander... Spock staring at her. "You should join us, Spock," she said seductively. "Your place is with us, your distant cousins... These Humans do not appreciate you as they should."

"I agree, Commander," Spock replied.

"This is a spy trip, is it not?" she asked.

"I do not know," Spock said. "But Kirk will know. He can be made to talk."

Kirk stared at Spock in horror. Romulan guards approached; he was seized and stripped, fastened to a wall. He twisted his head round to look at Spock. The Vulcan had picked up a whip and was approaching with it.

"I have tolerated you too long, Kirk," he said coldly, harshly. "I have supported your illogic too long. But now we shall see which of us is the stronger."

The whip lashed down across his back, with the full force of Vulcan strength cutting the skin. It fell again, again... Kirk bit his lip against the pain, struggling to remain silent. At last it stopped.

"Will you tell us, Kirk?" Spock's voice was cold, harsh, full of sadistic pleasure. With an effort Kirk shook his head.

The woman rapped out a sentence in Romulan; Kirk didn't understand what she said, although he felt that he should have done. The ropes fastening him were untied; he was dragged across the room to a table and thrown down onto it, roughly, on his back, the impact jarring all the whip cuts.

Four guards held his arms and legs; he closed his eyes for a moment to shut

out the expression on their faces, and felt the smoothness of the table change under his back to a rough uneven surface. He blinked his eyes open again.

The Romulan ship had vanished; in its place was an uninviting landscape. But one thing hadn't changed; Spock still stood there, whip raised; then he brought it down, full force, across Kirk's unprotected stomach.

He twisted in agony, tearing his lacerated back still further on the rough surface of the boulder on which he was lying.

"I wonder how long he can remain silent under this?" Spock said, calculatingly. Then he brought the whip down again. Again Kirk writhed, silent under the fire that shot through his body. The whip came down again...again... A tiny corner of his mind knew that ten lashes was the sentence; though when at last the whip ceased to fall, it felt like many more strokes than ten.

Harbi, watching, licked his lips delightedly, savouring the spicy tang of remembered agony. This was the best taste yet; better than hate, better than hurt, better than anger or fear. He wanted more...

"Will you tell us?" Spock's voice insisted. Kirk was beyond speaking. He dared not open his mouth for fear of losing the fragile control he had over his desire to scream...and scream...and scream...

The lash fell again...again...

Spock came out of his cabin as McCoy passed on his way to Kirk's quarters. "How is the Captain, Doctor?"

"I don't know yet, I'm just going in to see him now. He should still be asleep, though; I gave him a couple of extra-strong sleeping pills, should knock him out for about fifteen hours, and he promised to take them. You know, it's funny, Spock; he's...well, I gave him the pills the night before, and he didn't take them. He's badly underslept, and he seems to be fighting going to sleep or he'd have taken them. He admitted having one or two nightmares, but when I suggested that we should get you to meld with him to try to find out what's causing them, he refused point-blank. Didn't seem to want - " He broke off as an agonised scream, piercing for all that it was muffled by the closed door, came from Kirk's room. As one, they leaped for the door. McCoy pressed the button to open it; they went in.

Kirk was writhing on the bed, his face a twisted mask of agony, as he screamed...and screamed...

Spock reached him first, and gripped his arms roughly, shaking him. "Jim! Wake up! Jim!"

McCoy reached into his bag for a hypo. "He's too deeply doped by the sleeping pills to waken," he said. He pressed the hypo against Kirk's shoulder, and the Captain subsided from sleep into unconsciousness.

Harbi wrinkled his face in distaste at the honey-sweet taste of concern that reached him from their minds, and withdrew contact, maintaining only the tenuous link that held Kirk a helpless prisoner of his greed.

Spock and McCoy looked at each other. "If that's the extent of one of his nightmares, no wonder he's fighting sleep," Spock said quietly.

McCoy nodded. "What I don't understand is why he refused to let you meld with him. Could you trace the origins of the nightmares, as I suggested?"

"Probably...but if he is unwilling, he would fight my influence in his mind."

"Whether he fights it or not, Spock, you're going to have to do it," McCoy said slowly.

Spock nodded. "It does seem to be the only solution," he agreed reluctantly.

They looked at each other again, then, by mutual consent, sat down to wait for Kirk to regain consciousness.

Kirk lay quiet for a little while, but then he began to toss restlessly again. McCoy bent over him anxiously.

"What is it, Doctor?"

"I don't know, Spock. I just don't know. It's as if... Remember on Deneva? The people affected by the parasites showed strong reactions even when they were unconscious. He should be out cold after that shot I gave him; but he seems to be in the grip of a further nightmare..."

Spock reached out to touch Kirk's head; but before he could, Kirk's eyes opened. He stared up at them, pain and horror showing clearly in his eyes.

"It's all right, Jim," McCoy said soothingly. "You're awake now... That must have been some dream."

Kirk shuddered. "It was...pretty bad," he admitted. He became aware of Spock beside him and, almost without knowing he was doing it, he moved fractionally to get further away from the Vulcan.

Spock noticed the withdrawal, slight though it was, and moved away himself, his face wooden. McCoy noticed it too.

"Jim - what's wrong with you?"

"I - nothing, Bones."

"No? What was your dream about?"

"It was just...reliving one of my...my less pleasant memories," Kirk said hesitantly.

"Go on."

"I'd...rather not."

"And the rest of your nightmares?"

"Were much the same," he said unwillingly.

"All right, Jim. Now, there must be some reason for them; I said that already. The only way we can find out what's causing them is for Spock to mind-link with you."

"No!"

"He's prepared to do it," McCoy told him, Surely that was why Jim was refusing...his knowledge of how unpleasant it would be for Spock.

"No," Kirk said again. "I told you, Bones, I don't want anyone nosing around inside my skull."

McCoy glanced at Spock apologetically. "Jim, either you agree to it or I declare you medically unfit for duty, sedate you and have Spock do it anyway. It'll be more pleasant all round if you submit voluntarily."

Kirk stared at him, gauging the extent of his implacability. Then he sighed. "All right," he said. "Get on with it."

Spock came back almost reluctantly. He reached out to touch Kirk's face; and sent a tendril of thought into Kirk's mind.

At once he became aware of a stranger there, standing in a shadowed corner of Kirk's mind, watching. He moved towards the stranger, and found Kirk standing in his way, facing him.

"You must let me past, Jim," he said quietly.

"No!" Kirk gasped. "You want to get behind me, stab me in the back..."

Spock stared at him in amazement, amazement that lessened as he realised that he was holding a knife in his hand. Now where had that come from?

"You must let me past," he repeated. "I am not any danger to you, Jim. But he is." He nodded past Kirk to the shadowy stranger.

He tried to step past, tried to move round Kirk; but his Captain moved with him, turning to keep facing him, and the stranger moved too, keeping behind Kirk.

"Look behind you, Jim. There's your enemy - not me. Jim, I hate to remind you of it, but how often have I saved you in the past? Would I do that, then seek to stab you in the back now? Look behind you."

The inner struggle showed on Kirk's face. He wanted to trust Spock...so much, so very much...but that horrible little thread of thought still whispered inside his head, /He's tricking you...he hates you.../

With an effort, a terrible mind-wrenching effort, Kirk gasped, "Spock... help me!...help me!" He held out his hand. Spock gripped it, and pulled Kirk to his side, turning him to face the shadow.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The shadow moved slightly; a man-shape, its face a featureless mask, it was completely anonymous. Spock lifted the knife he was still holding and moved towards it.

"If you destroy me, you destroy Kirk," a hoarse, sighing, unidentifiable voice whispered. "If you destroy me here, you destroy his mind; if you do discover who I am and destroy my body, you destroy him just as effectively..." The figure thinned, became transparent, vanished.

Kirk became aware of McCoy standing there, watching anxiously, and realised that the doctor had heard none of the exchange. It had all been inside his head. Beside him, Spock said, "We were partly successful, Doctor. There was someone else inside the Captain's mind, influencing his thoughts... He is gone now, at least for the moment, but unless we can find out who it is and somehow disable him, he will re-enter - and continue to give the Captain nightmares, whatever his reason for so doing."

With some difficulty, Kirk said, "Spock... What I said about the dreams... They were all things that did happen...but he twisted them somehow, so that you ...you were the one trying to harm me..."

"Have you no idea of who it could be, Captain?" Spock asked briskly.

Kirk shook his head. "I didn't even know he was there, Spock... Bones, who on board, apart from Spock, is telepathic?"

McCoy shook his head. "No-one, as far as I know."

Kirk glanced at Spock, who also shook his head. "Anyone who is, is hiding the fact."

"If you melded with him, would you know?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Spock, I hate to ask it of you, but we have to find him. Even if it means you linking with everybody on the ship."

Spock nodded. "Yes, Captain."

"It isn't as bad as that," McCoy put in. "I think we can forget about the Humans on board; and we can forget about most of the aliens too. The ones to investigate are the aliens who joined the ship recently, and there are only one or two of them." He saw Kirk's puzzled look, and went on. "Don't you see, Jim? Your nightmares are so recent, it can't be anyone who's been on the ship for a while that's responsible, or they'd have started long ago."

"Yes," Spock said. "Of course. Now why didn't I think of that? However, Doctor, we can take the matter one step further; which of the new alien crew-members would have any cause to dislike the Captain enough to give him nightmares, nightmares in which I am the villain?"

"There's only one of them that I've had anything to do with yet," Kirk put in. "And possibly only the one that you've had anything to do with either."

They looked at each other. "Ensign Harbi?" Spock asked.

"You reported him to me, and I stopped him wearing his medallion. He would certainly resent that," Kirk replied. He glanced at McCoy. "Bones, what information have you on the Dorians? Are they telepathic?"

"If they are, it's never been reported," McCoy said.

"Let's find out." Kirk reached for the intercom. "Ensign Harbi, report immediately to the Captain's quarters."

Harbi, when he arrived, was the polite, courteous, non-obtrusive, unlikable officer they had come to expect him to be.

"Yes, sir," he asked.

Kirk nodded to Spock. "Ensign, will you permit Mr. Spock to mind-link with you?"

"For what purpose, sir?"

Kirk looked searchingly at him. "I think you know that, Ensign."

Harbi's face twisted with rage. He reached out with his mind; Kirk cried out as the Dorian's mind crashed into his with brutal force. Harbi glared defiantly at Spock. "If you try to hurt me, you kill the Captain," he gasped.

"We're wanting to help you," Spock said reasonably, quietly, gently, even though his mind was a seething mass of anxiety for Kirk's safety - for Kirk's very sanity. Kirk's only chance lay in not frightening Harbi. He reached out to touch the Dorian, even though his mind shrank from the black hatred he already sensed in the other's thoughts; and Kirk screamed again, in sudden agony, as Harbi sent a red-hot thought spiking through his brain.

Balked, Spock retreated slightly. He caught McCoy's eye, and moved sideways; Harbi turned with him, to keep facing him. Cautiously, McCoy moved the few steps that separated him from the Dorian, and thrust the hypo against his neck. Harbi gasped; Kirk screamed again; then the Ensign fell unconscious while Spock leaped forward to support the staggering Kirk, who reeled from the effect of the white-hot dagger-thrust in his mind. Kirk clutched at Spock, gasping, while the Vulcan projected soothing thoughts.

Meanwhile McCoy, leaving Kirk to Spock, bent over the Dorian, his diagnostic scanner busy. At last he straightened.

"Well, Bones?"

McCoy shook his head. "His brain waves are showing definite abnormalities, Jim. In my opinion, this man is insane."

Kirk shuddered again. "He's still affecting me," he said. "I can feel him; now that I know about him, I can definitely feel him."

Spock moved now, to touch Harbi's head. He concentrated; his face twisted with distaste as he felt the lust for unpleasant emotions that boiled in the Dorian's head. His eyes closed in the effort to separate Kirk from Harbi; then the Human cried out again as he felt the thread of thought pull out of his mind, hurting like a pulled tooth.

Spock glanced at McCoy. "You must kill him," he gasped. "Now, while he is unable to fight back. You must...or he will kill Jim..." His face showed

the strain of holding the link while talking.

McCoy said slowly, unwillingly, "Is it essential?"

"Yes... His own people would say so... This condition is dangerous and incurable..."

If Spock thought so, it had to be so. Unwilling but resigned, McCoy gave Harbi the appropriate shot. The Dorian's body went completely limp; Spock pulled his mind free at the last possible moment.

"I'll take his body to sickbay," McCoy said quietly. "Jim, you should try to get a proper sleep now. You should be all right."

Kirk nodded, with a weak smile. But after McCoy had gone, he turned to Spock. "Spock...can I ask you a favour?"

"Certainly, Captain."

"Harbi... He is dead, isn't he?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Even so...I'm...afraid to sleep...those nightmares were...were pretty bad. Spock, would you meld with me again...so that I know you're there to help me?"

Spock reached out without replying to touch Kirk's face. Then he whispered, "Our minds are one..."

He sat on the edge of the bed, holding Kirk's hand. Kirk smiled as he closed his eyes. Spock concentrated. Peace...tranquillity...comfort...

Kirk walked through an open meadow, relaxing in the peaceful atmosphere. Spock came forward to meet him, and without speaking turned to walk beside him. At the edge of the meadow they stopped and looked back at the beautiful panorama behind them. They smiled at each other; and together, they walked on.

A VULCAN'S LAMENT FOR HIS HOMELAND by Beth Hallam

Come close, come close,
And steal into my mind.
In its deep recesses, you might find
The vision-chains, that bind
Me, to my home.

Stay here, stay near,
That, through the open portals of my sight,
You'll walk into the dark, dark womb of night,
Unlit, save by those distant pricks of light.
This is my home.

Hold still, hold still!
Lest by moving, you should jar
Those fleeting visions, errant thoughts that are
My only way across the star-filled voids, that bar
Me, from my home.

What do Kirk and Spock play in their spare time?
Astronaughts and crosses...

A STEP IN TIME by Valerie Piacentini

The journey through the Time Gate had been intended as a peaceful relaxation for Kirk and McCoy; for the historians the Enterprise had brought to the Time Planet, it was a much more serious affair. Once the formalities had been arranged, Kirk felt free to turn to a more personal matter. McCoy had been under a great deal of strain; ideally, he should have taken shore leave, but there was no prospect of that in the near future, and with his usual stubbornness, he refused to be relieved of duty.

As the next best thing, Kirk suggested that he and McCoy should take advantage of their enforced wait at the Time Planet, and themselves take a trip into the past. He told Bones that as a child he had been promised a trip to London, a trip that had been cancelled because of an illness; he had never had that holiday, and had always regretted it.

"Come with me, Bones," he suggested. "I know I can use the break, and I'm sure you can; it'll only be a couple of days, but we can see the sights, take in a show, have a bit of a rest." McCoy agreed readily; he knew himself he needed a break, and it might be fun.

The ship's stores provided them with the appropriate clothes and money, and it was with an almost forgotten sense of anticipation that they passed through the Time Gate, and stepped from an alley into a busy London street.

They spent the next two days simply enjoying their holiday, revelling in the freedom of tourists as they visited the historic sites by day, and in the evening joined in the varied night life of the city. Over breakfast on their third morning, McCoy said,

"I don't know about you, Jim, but I feel like being thoroughly lazy this morning."

"Good idea. Let's go to the park and feed the ducks." In response to McCoy's quizzical glance, he went on defensively, "Well, I read about it once. People do that sort of thing in London, and I promised myself that if I ever got to London, I'd have a go."

"All right, then, as long as we find somewhere quiet."

When they left the hotel, Jim insisted on buying some bread. McCoy was teasing him about it as they waited to cross the road, when their attention was caught by a car that had stopped for the traffic lights; there was something familiar about the tall dignified figure in the back seat. Curious, Jim moved for a better look, then said, "Look, Bones. It's Sarek."

It was indeed the Vulcan Ambassador, Spock's father, younger than they knew him, but unmistakable. As the car moved off, Bones said, laughing, "Well, they do say that if you spend long enough in London you'll meet everyone you know, but I don't think they had this in mind."

The sheer normality of the scene in the park was a tonic to the two men, for whom the unexpected, the dangerous, sometimes the terrible, were part of everyday life. Here, on the cool grass, children played, dogs ran barking, lovers walked hand in hand as they had done for centuries. On the lake, the birds waited expectantly for the food that long generations of experience had taught them would be forthcoming.

At last their aimless strolling brought them to an area of the park which seemed to be deserted. They came through a belt of trees to find themselves standing on the crest of a slope which ran down to the water's edge; the bank rose in a curve, forming a small bay sheltered from view by the trees. Feeling like a rest after their walk, Jim and McCoy stretched out on the grass, enjoying

the warm sunshine on their faces. After a few minutes, Bones touched Jim on the arm, and pointed silently. Below them at the water's edge a child had appeared as if from nowhere. Kneeling on the bank, he was offering food to a pair of magnificent swans; the birds showed no fear, but glided closer, at last bending their graceful necks to take the food from his fingers. A flash of colour sped from the bushes below them to the boy's foot - a red squirrel, showing no trace of timidity, had run up to claim his share. The child laughed softly, and held something out; the squirrel took it, and sat up on its haunches to nibble contentedly. The two men smiled, enjoying the scene - the confidence of the normally shy squirrel, the grace of the birds, the child's pleasure in his companions. Then suddenly, horribly, the tranquillity of the scene was shattered. With no warning, a shower of stones hurtled down on the group; the swans vanished in a flurry of white wings, but the squirrel was not fast enough - he lay broken and bleeding beneath a jagged rock.

A group of children came through the bushes to stand in a semi-circle round the boy. Their faces were sullen and hostile, and each carried a stick or a piece of stone. Though he must have been aware of their presence, the boy, who was bending over the squirrel, did not react at once; he gently laid the broken little body down on the grass, his fingers lingering for a moment on the soft fur, before he stood and faced the intruders.

Jim could not repress a gasp of astonishment as he saw the boy's face for the first time. There was no mistaking the slanting eyebrows or the elegant pointed ears; a Vulcan child, perhaps seven years old Jim estimated, about half the age of the children who now surrounded him. The manace in their attitude was unmistakable, but the child showed no fear in the face of their hostility. He knew there was no escape, and with the dignity of his race composed himself to meet whatever might come. At first, only words, which he could pretend not to hear.

"Freak! Halfbreed freak!"

"With those ears, he should be in a circus!"

"Devil child! You've got no right here!"

"Why don't you go back to your own world - monster!"

The insults grew worse as the child's calm indifference enraged his tormentors. Jim felt his anger rising at the unfair odds, but for the moment he dared not interfere; he knew the risks of taking any action which might alter the past. They the oldest of the children called out mockingly,

"Come on! Let's show Spock we mean it - we don't want him here!"

Spock! Was it possible? Jim's eyes flew to the face of the Vulcan child. Yes, it could be...it surely must be. He would be about the right age, and they had seen Sarek only that morning. He turned to McCoy, but the question on his lips was never spoken, for the doctor's face was white, and his eyes wide with horror.

"My God, no!" screamed Bones. "Stop!"

It was too late. Even as Jim turned back to the scene below, the barrage of sticks and rocks struck the Vulcan child, and he crumpled to the grass. In the same instant Jim and McCoy sprang to their feet and rushed forward. The children fled, startled by their sudden appearance, but neither of the men had time to be concerned with them. Sick with terror, Jim dropped to his knees beside McCoy, who was already at work.

"It's bad enough, but not too serious, apart from the wound on his head. The cut's deep, and there may be concussion. I'll give him a sedative to keep him out." He worked steadily for a few minutes, giving the injection and dressing the cut on the child's head. At last he sat back on his heels.

"Jim, my readings confirm it - the child is half Human. It's our Spock, all right. I've got to keep him under for a while - he mustn't see us. Trouble

is, we can't stay here and I don't want to move him too far; he's had a bad shock, and it could be dangerous. We can't leave him like this, yet if he comes round and gets a good look at us, heaven knows what complications that will cause."

"We'll worry about that later. We should get under cover, though - there's a hut among those trees; we can take him there, and you can keep an eye on him."

As they walked back through the trees, Jim tried to control his confused thoughts. It was difficult to realise that the child in his arms would grow up to become his First Officer. Spock - dependable, trustworthy, unshakably loyal Spock, as dear to him as a brother. Disjointed memories of the past - or the future - came through to him.

..... "You would not...have survived this... "

..... "You know, of course, I could never have made it without you... "

..... "Listen to me, Jim. Be with me. They are only illusions... "

So many times, defeat turned into victory, danger into safety, the risks shared, perils overcome, the joy and the agony.

How would it be - he could not imagine how it would be - to return to a world that did not hold Spock. The child was in danger, he could read it in McCoy's eyes. Was this part of Spock's past, or had their presence altered things? He would not know until he returned to the Enterprise.

When they reached the hut he laid Spock down on a pile of sacks in the corner. McCoy passed his medical tricorder over him, and sighed in relief.

"I think he's going to be all right."

Their eyes met.

"You felt it too, didn't you, Bones?"

"I must be going soft in the head!" Then, quietly, "Yes. I suddenly realised that I could not contemplate the idea of losing Spock; it'd be like losing part of myself. But if you ever tell him I said so..."

Jim nodded; he knew only too well the solid affection and friendship for Spock that underlay McCoy's sarcasm. Then to his surprise, the doctor continued in a tone of bitter self-disgust,

"I thought I was so clever - that I understood him. How could I even begin to guess at - this! Think of it, Jim; think what his childhood must have been like! Yet somehow, by some miracle, I swear, he became the man he is. We both know what he's done for us on the Enterprise; we could never begin to understand how much he had to forgive."

"You said it yourself, Bones. That's the kind of man he is."

As the afternoon passed, the shadows lengthened under the trees, and the child slept on. From time to time McCoy leaned over to check his progress, and was satisfied. Twilight was fading into dusk when Spock stirred and woke. In the dim light the two men could see his face only faintly, the dark eyes wide with surprise; their own faces were hidden from him in the shadows.

"Where am I? Who are you?" The questions came calmly, as only Spock could have asked them under such conditions.

"Do you remember what happened?" McCoy's voice was very gentle.

"Yes, I remember. The children...you must not blame them...they do not understand. I must seem a - freak - to them. In time, they will learn."

For a moment, Jim felt tears sting his eyes. Even so would the adult Spock have reacted.

"You were hurt," he said softly. "If you feel up to it, we will take you home now - your parents will be worried."

"Thank you, I am quite recovered. But who are you?"

"Forgive me, but I cannot tell you that, nor can I explain why we must not be seen. Can you trust us?"

The child considered for a moment, then smiled. "As you wish. I think - no, I am sure - that I can trust you."

"Thank you, Spock."

"You know me?" The question came swiftly; even at seven, he missed nothing.

"One of the children called you by name," McCoy broke in. "We must be going now - I don't think we have much time."

Jim too had felt the familiar sensation that warned him that their stay in the past was drawing to a close; soon the Guardian of Forever would reach out for them, and return them to their own time.

Guided by Spock, they set off towardsthe Vulcan Embassy, where Sarek and his family were staying. Accepting their wish for concealment, he led them to the rear of the building, and showed them where to climb the wall into the garden. Across the lawn they could see the tall figure of a woman restlessly pacing the terrace.

"My mother, the Lady Amanda," whispered Spock. "Will you not meet her - she will wish to thank you."

"No, we must go now," said Jim. "Don't keep your mother waiting any longer." Still the child lingered.

"Then I must try to thank you myself." He extended his hand, fingers spread in the Vulcan fashion. "Live long and prosper. I believe we will meet again."

Gently, Jim touched his fingertips to those of the child. "I hope so. Live long and prosper, Spock of Vulcan."

Turning, the child held out his hand to McCoy. "Thank you for your care. I think that we too will meet again."

"Farewell, Spock. Try not to judge all Humans by those children."

"I could not, after meeting you. Farewell." He inclined his head gravely, and was gone, running across the lawn to the woman, who knelt, arms wide, to receive him. As mother and son met, the scene faded around them, and Jim and Bones were standing on the sand before the Guardian of Forever. Jim pulled out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise - Scott here."

"Two to beam up, Scotty."

As they stepped down from the transporter platform, they were surprised to see Spock himself at the controls.

"Something wrong, Mr. Spock?"

"No, Captain, all is in order. I trust you and the Doctor had a restful trip."

"Hardly restful, Mr. Spock. Eventful, perhaps."

"I see. My calculations were correct, then."

"Your calculations?"

For answer Spock lifted a hand to his forehead, just where the stone had struck him all those years - or hours - ago.

"When I was seven, I visited London with my parents. I was - hurt, and two

men helped me. I never saw their faces, or heard their names - until I joined the Enterprise."

"How long have you known?"

"I did not at first. I came to recognise you only as I knew you better; and I realised that for you, the event had not yet happened. When you left, I knew when and where the Time Gate would take you, and that I could speak of it at last."

"It's quite a coincidence, though," said Jim, "that out of all the people in London, it should have been Bones and I who found you."

"Coincidence? I think not." McCoy spoke softly, seriously, his usual sarcastic wit laid aside. "I think that the bonds of friendship that hold us were strong enough to draw us together, even out of our own time."

"For once, Doctor, I would not disagree." For a moment the smile of the child Spock had been lit his usually impassive face. McCoy returned the smile warmly, and Jim grinned in relief. It would not last, of course; soon they'd be back to the usual bickering, but he knew that they all had a better understanding of the very real affection that linked them.

It was good to be home.

THE RIDDLE by T.G.Z.C.

What do they want from me, the Vians?
They have not injured me, they care for me,
I have more comfort here than in my home;
Here I have privacy, although.....
I think they have some way of watching me.
This place is all enclosed...and very dark.
I searched and searched and found no exit from it -
Why do they keep me from the cool, fresh air?
What do they want from me? I have no way
To ask them what I want to know -- and they -
It seems they do not wish that I should know.
I touched them...but it did not help;
Their thoughts are strange...distant, detached.
They do not seem sadistically cruel
Yet since they brought me here two men have died...
And now three more have come. I am afraid.

Kirk: Bones, did you hear about the horse that jumped over the moon?

McCoy: No, what about it?

Kirk: It was a nightmare.

* * * * *

Kirk: Well, Mr. Chekov, this is your first experience of navigating a Starship. Have you worked out our present position?

Chekov (whispering): I think we should all be standing to attention, sir.

Kirk: Why? And why are you whispering?

Chekov: According to my calculations, we are just passing through the Kremlin....

ARA by Janet Quarton

The U.S.S. Enterprise entered orbit around Auriga 3; Kirk sat in his command chair studying the planet's surface on the main viewing screen. He turned to Mr. Spock, who was at his console analysing data on the planet.

"Analysis, Mr. Spock."

"The planet is class M," Spock said. "I get humanoid life form readings. They seem to be in fairly small groups, no indications of large cities. Civilization rates about G, similar to that in the United States of America, Earth, in the mid-eighteen hundreds."

Kirk considered the information for a moment. "Spock, do you think we can conduct our survey without coming into contact with the planet's inhabitants?"

"It should be possible to do so, Captain. The planet's surface is not very densely populated."

Kirk nodded and turned to Uhura.

"Lt. Uhura, contact Dr. McCoy and that new man - Ensign Freeman. Tell them both to report to the Transporter Room in ten minutes for landing party duty. Tell Mr. Scott to report to the bridge immediately."

"Aye, aye, sir." Uhura acknowledged the order and set about obeying it. Kirk got up and made his way over to Spock.

"Spock, do we have any information on this planet?"

"No, sir, we are the first ship to enter this solar system. There are no records of any other ship having been in this area."

"As I thought. In that case the Prime Directive is in full force." Kirk stopped speaking and turned, having heard the elevator doors. Scott entered the bridge and joined Kirk and Spock.

"Ah, Scotty," Kirk said, smiling at his engineer. "Spock and I are taking a landing party down to the planet's surface. While we're away I want you to take the Enterprise and survey this planet's two moons. We're due at Starbase 11 in two weeks and I'd rather not be late; this will save us a couple of days." Seeing a query on Spock's face, he asked, "What is it, Spock?"

"It will mean that we will be beyond communicator range of the ship, sir."

"We'll take an emergency beacon with us. Scotty, if you pick up a signal from it head straight back and contact us. If you don't hear from us, we'll contact you in forty-eight hours; be back by then. You have the con, Scotty."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"C'mon, Mr. Chekov. You can join the landing party."

"Yes, sir." Chekov was elated at the thought of a change from routine duties. He left his station and entered the turbo-lift with Kirk and Spock. Scott signalled another crewman to take over the navigation console.

Kirk entered the transporter room to find the rest of the landing party waiting for him, already equipped. Spock and Chekov had tricorders, McCoy had his medical tricorder and emergency medical kit, Ensign Freeman carried a couple of packs of food rations. Knowing that Spock would have made sure they had everything necessary, Kirk picked up the emergency beacon that was sitting by the console and spoke to the transporter chief.

"Prepare to beam us down, Mr. Kyle."

"Aye, sir," Kyle replied and set the controls. The landing party entered the transporter chamber and when everyone was in position, Kirk gave the order.

"Energise."

The transporter chief operated the controls and the landing party shimmered and dematerialised.

The group materialised near the bank of a fast-flowing river. It was hilly, barren country and some of the hills sloped right down to the edge of the river. The sides of the hills were strewn with rocks of all sizes.

After having a quick look round, Kirk took out his communicator and flipped it open. "Kirk to Enterprise. Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Scott here, Sir."

"We've beamed down safely, Scotty. We'll rendezvous with you in forty-eight hours. Contact us as soon as you return."

"Aye, sir. Good luck. Scott out."

Kirk put away his tricorder and went over to Spock, who was taking tricorder readings. "Are you picking up anything, Spock?" he asked.

"There is a village about three miles away, across the river, but I do not pick up any signs of humanoids closer to us than that."

"Good, with any luck they won't come to the river. Keep a check on readings, though, just in case."

"Yes, sir."

Kirk crossed to Chekov and Freeman and told them to go up the hillside and see what they could find. He cautioned them, saying, "Be careful where you are walking. Some of those rocks look loose."

They acknowledged and set off up the hill. Kirk walked along the river bank to where McCoy was standing, his medical kit and all their supplies sitting on a rock next to him. The hill sloped steeply up behind him. McCoy smiled at Kirk.

"This place isn't bad, is it, Jim. It's nice to see the blue sky and hear the sound of the river."

"Are you feeling homesick, Bones?"

"Not exactly, but it's nice to be off the ship for a while. It's a shame we couldn't send the whole crew down, we've had a rough time of it lately and they could do with a rest."

"We'll be at Starbase 11 in a couple of weeks. The crew will get shore leave there. They certainly deserve it."

"Well, I suggest you try to relax while we're here, Jim. You're looking all in."

"Don't worry so much, Bones. I'll relax with the crew on Starbase 11," Kirk replied cheerfully, but he thought that McCoy was more right than he knew. They had had a hard time lately and he was feeling all in. He was looking forward to that shore leave very much.

While Kirk and McCoy were talking, Chekov and Freeman were climbing the hillside behind them. Freeman was being a bit reckless and Chekov spoke to him about it.

"You'd better be careful, Freeman. You'll trip over some of those rocks."

"Don't worry about me. I used to play on hills like these as a kid. Just watch me!"

With that he ran across the hillside. He was passing directly behind Kirk and McCoy when his foot turned on a stone and he fell flat. The stone rolled down the hillside, taking more and more with it, starting a landslide.

Down below, his senior officers heard the rumble above their conversation; they looked round but were too late to run to safety. They were both knocked from their feet by rocks; the supplies and McCoy's medical kit were knocked into the river and carried away downstream.

McCoy struggled to his feet, feeling the pain from several bruises. Automatically, he began to check the gear, and found, to his dismay, that the supplies and his kit were gone, and his medical tricorder smashed. He turned angrily to Kirk.

"Jim, what the devil... Jim!"

Kirk was lying still, face down on the ground. McCoy ran to him.

"Jim!" he called anxiously, but Kirk didn't stir. McCoy quickly bent down beside him and felt for his pulse. To his relief he found it, weak but steady. He gently turned Kirk over and found that he was bleeding from a nasty cut on the side of his head.

Just then Spock appeared and hurried over to them. "I heard rocks falling, Doctor. What happened?"

"Something started a landslide. We were caught in its path."

Spock looked at Kirk and saw the cut. "How is he, Doctor?"

"He seems to be just knocked out. I can't check him properly, because my tricorder is smashed, my medical kit - and the supplies - have gone. I think they must have been swept away by the river. To be on the safe side, I think you'd better activate that beacon and bring the Enterprise back."

"I can't, Doctor. It was with the supplies. Look after the Captain as best you can - I'll send Chekov and Freeman to see if they can find any food and shelter."

McCoy nodded worriedly and Spock went off. McCoy took off his undergarment and tore a strip off it. He wet the strip in the river, and then, making it into a pad, bathed Kirk's head.

Kirk came to slowly. His head was aching viciously and for a moment he didn't know where he was. He struggled to sit up and felt himself being gently pushed back.

"Easy, Jim. Just lie quiet for a few minutes." It was McCoy's voice.

Kirk obeyed - he hadn't the strength to do otherwise. Recollection flooded back to him and he remembered the landslide. He tried to open his eyes, then shut them quickly as the glare of light sent a searing pain through his head.

McCoy, seeing the grimace of pain on Kirk's face, wished he had his medical kit so that he could do something to help. Still, he hadn't, so he would have to do the best he could with what he had. He took hold of Kirk's wrist, feeling for his pulse. It was still rather weak and McCoy wasn't happy. How he wished that he had his medical tricorder so that he could examine Kirk properly. That was the disadvantage of using machines for everything, you began to rely on them.

Kirk tried opening his eyes again, being careful to do it very slowly this time. It was quite a fight and he screwed up his face against the pain. Eventually he managed it and after a few seconds his vision cleared and he looked up into the concerned face of Dr. McCoy. Kirk tried to speak.

"Bones..."

"Just keep still, Jim."

"I'm all right, Bones, I..."

Kirk tried to sit up. Suddenly his stomach turned and he rolled over and was violently sick. When the spasm passed he sank back to the ground exhausted,

his head pounding. McCoy went to the river and wet the cloth; he then went back to Kirk and wiped his face.

Feeling the damp cloth on his face, Kirk opened his eyes. McCoy smiled down at him. "Now maybe you'll do as you're told and lie still."

"What happened, Bones?"

McCoy told him about the landslide and how the supplies were all lost. Kirk frowned. Just then Spock came running up. He was pleased to see Kirk conscious, but hid it.

"Captain, there is a group of humanoids heading this way. If we are going to remain out of their sight we will have to move inland."

"Where are Chekov and Freeman?" Kirk asked.

"They are scouting around to see if they can find some food."

"Get them back here, quick."

"Yes, sir." Spock took out his communicator and flipped it open. "Chekov, this is Spock. Come in."

"Chekov here, sir."

"Have you found anything?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Then report back here immediately, with Mr. Freeman."

"On our way, sir."

Spock put the communicator away and looked at McCoy. "Is the Captain fit to travel, Doctor?"

"No, he isn't, Spock. Can we hang on here for another couple of hours to give him a chance to recover?"

"Sorry, Doctor, the aliens will be here within half an hour..."

"We've got to get out of here, Bones," Kirk interrupted. "Don't worry, I'll be O.K. Give me a hand up."

Both Spock and McCoy helped Kirk to his feet, where he stood swaying. If they had let go he would have fallen down. They helped him over to a rock and made him sit on it. The exertion had increased the pounding in Kirk's head and his stomach was churning. He gritted his teeth, fighting it down and trying to hide his discomfort, but he was not fooling them. They stood beside him, supporting him, till he began to recover. McCoy frowned at Spock.

"It's no use, Spock, this isn't going to work. Jim just can't walk."

The pounding in Kirk's head was beginning to ease and his stomach was settling. "I'll be all right, Bones," he whispered. It was a lie, of course, but he wasn't going to risk the others getting caught just because of his weakness.

"Sure you will. Just getting to your feet was almost too much for you. You might as well face the fact that you're as weak as a kitten and in no condition to go anywhere."

"Bones, we've got to move inland. We can't take the chance of those humanoids seeing us. Starfleet orders are quite specific on that point. We would be in direct violation of the Prime Directive."

"The Captain is quite right, Doctor," agreed Spock. "We cannot stay here. These are primitive people and primitive people tend to fear strangers. It is quite possible that they would attack us and we cannot use the phasers to defend ourselves. We must get out of sight. Here are Chekov and Freeman."

The junior officers came running up to them, slightly out of breath. Freeman saw Kirk sitting on the rock looking very pale and ill. He noticed the long gash on the side of Kirk's head and felt uneasy, guilty. He knew that all this was his fault but he didn't know what to say. He hung back and let Chekov do the talking.

"Sir, we've just seen a party of aliend heading this way. We were careful that they didn't see us, but they'll be here in about ten minutes."

"That settles it, Bones," Kirk said as firmly as he could manage. "We've got to leave."

He stood up and took a step forward. Spock was there to catch him as he fell. He gently laid his Captain on the ground. McCoy bent down and took Kirk's pulse; he frowned and pulled back Kirk's eyelid then turned to Spock.

"It's no use, he's out cold again."

Spock stood deep in thought for a moment, then he bent down and picked Kirk up in his arms. "Let's get out of here," he said.

Carrying Kirk's limp body, Spock started walking away from the river; the others followed. Chekov took continuous tricorder readings to make sure that they were not being followed or heading towards any more aliens.

As they headed away from the river they were surrounded by barren, rocky hills with no sign of greenery. The going underfoot was very rough. After they'd walked for about an hour, Spock came to a halt and carefully laid Kirk on the ground. The Captain was beginning to stir and to moan. McCoy was quickly at his side. He took Kirk's wrist and felt his pulse; he found it still weak and rather rapid. Standing up, he indicated to Spock that he wanted to speak with him. Spock acknowledged with a nod and turned to Chekov.

"Mr. Chekov, take Freeman and have a scout round. Don't go too far."

"Aye, sir."

As Chekov and Freeman left, Spock went over to McCoy. "How is he, Doctor?"

"He's beginning to come round. Can we stay here a while to give him a chance to rest? That was a bad blow he had and he's suffering from concussion and slight shock. He needs rest."

"We will stay here till nightfall and then head back to the river. We require water and have nothing to carry it in. The humanoids are unlikely to be abroad at night."

"Isn't there a chance that there might be water nearer here?"

"An unlikely probability in view of the barrenness of the landscape."

Consciousness was returning to Kirk and he gradually became aware of the voices of Spock and McCoy. He turned his head towards the sound and slowly opened his eyes, trying to focus on them standing near him. The movement forced an involuntary groan out of him, and his head resumed its pounding. McCoy, hearing the sound, came quickly to him and knelt at his side.

"Jim..."

"I know, I must lie still," Kirk cut in, managing a small smile.

"Yes, you must, and be sure you do. How do you feel?"

"Better, Bones. I just wish my head would stop beating like a drum. For once I wish you had some of those green pills on you."

"I'll remind you of that next time you complain about them. Try and get some sleep and the pain should ease off."

"Easier said than done."

"Well, just lie there. Close your eyes and try to relax."

Kirk did as he was told and he soon drifted off to sleep. McCoy, who had been watching him, saw his even breathing and was satisfied.

Kirk woke up a few hours later feeling slightly better; at least the pounding in his head had receded to a dull ache. He looked round at the barren landscape and saw McCoy and Spock in the distance, standing with their backs to him. He decided to join them. He eased himself into a sitting position, wincing in pain. Raising his hand to the source, he gently felt the long gash on the side of his head. It was decidedly tender. He sat still for a minute until the pain eased off and then pulled himself to his feet with the aid of a large boulder.

Once on his feet he was overcome by an attack of dizziness and leaned on the rock, shaking. Kirk was beginning to wonder if this was a good idea, but he didn't want to be a handicap to the others. He must prove to them that he was all right now.

After a few moments the dizziness eased and he was able to stand unsupported. He made his way slowly and unsteadily to where McCoy and Spock were standing. He felt weak and dizzy but he was determined to make it.

McCoy heard the footsteps and turned, horrified to see Kirk on his feet. He took the Captain's arm and guided him to a rock, where Kirk sat down, thankful for the rest.

McCoy was angry. "What the devil do you think you're doing?"

"I felt better, Bones."

"Well, if you don't take it easy, you won't be feeling better much longer. How's the head?"

"Not too bad, it just aches a bit," Kirk said, deciding to change the subject. "Spock, what is the situation at the moment?"

"My tricorder readings indicate that the aliens have left the river and returned to the village. Since we have no water I suggest we make our way back to the river when darkness falls."

"Have you found any food?"

"Negative, sir. There seems to be no vegetation or animal life on this side of the river. The natives seem to get their food from the other side of the river where the land is more fertile."

"How long have we got till the Enterprise is due back?"

"Thirty six point nine hours, sir."

"Well, I guess we'll have to do without food till then. I don't want to risk crossing the river and running into any of the aliens. That shouldn't be any problem, should it, Bones?"

"No, we can go for quite a while without food, so long as we've got a good supply of water."

Kirk nodded, regretted the motion, then turned to Spock. "Contact Chekov and Freeman and tell them to report back here, Spock. As soon as it is dark we'll head for the river."

Spock took out his communicator, flipped it open and contacted Chekov. Meanwhile, McCoy took charge of Kirk.

"Come on and sit under the shade of this rock, you'll be more comfortable. Get some more rest till it's time to go."

Kirk allowed McCoy to lead him to the rock; he hadn't the strength to argue. He sat in the shade and leaned back against the rock, thankful for somewhere to rest his aching head. Eventually he closed his eyes and was soon asleep.

When Kirk woke again it was getting dark. He felt very thirsty. He sat up and winced as his head resumed its aching - would it never stop?

McCoy had seen him move and came over to him. "How do you feel now, Jim?"

"I'm fine, Bones. Where's Spock?"

"He's just checking with his tricorder to make sure there's no-one close. Are you sure you feel fit enough to walk back to the river? It's pretty rough going."

"Don't worry so much, Bones. I'm fine."

Spock arrived with Chekov and Freeman. He came straight to Kirk. "There is no-one within a three mile radius, sir."

"All right, Spock. It's time we got on our way."

Kirk got to his feet carefully, aware that all eyes were on him. He had to stand still for a moment, fighting down waves of dizziness and nausea. He kept a straight face, determined not to let the others see how weak he was. This time, with the help of the darkness, he was successful, although McCoy wasn't completely convinced. After a few moments Kirk felt slightly better and called to Spock.

"Which way, Spock?"

"This way, Captain. If you prefer, I'll lead the way."

"Lead on."

Spock led the way slowly back towards the river. He deliberately walked slowly for Kirk's sake, but even at this pace the Captain was finding the going rather rough. He was getting used to the continuous ache in his head but the dizziness was hard to cope with. He couldn't understand why it was getting so warm. On most planets the temperature dropped at night, but here it seemed to be getting warmer. He began to feel the sweat running down his back. He forced himself to concentrate on just putting one foot in front of the other.

After what seemed an interminable time to Kirk, Spock stopped. "The river is just ahead of us, Captain."

Kirk's throat was too dry for him to answer; he just felt his way to the river bank, knelt down and took a long drink of the ice cold water. After he had drunk his fill he could not resist ducking his head into the river, the cold water felt so cooling on his hot, sweaty face and it eased his aching head. He held his head under as long as he could and then took another long drink. After this he felt a little fresher and climbed unsteadily to his feet. He could just make out McCoy's form approaching him out of the darkness.

"What do we do now, Jim?" McCoy asked.

Although Kirk felt slightly better he didn't think he could walk any further. It was all he could do now to stand on his feet.

"We'll stay close to the river and try to get some sleep. We can take turns at keeping watch. If the natives decide to come back we'll move inland tomorrow, if not we'll stay here. We want to be here when the Enterprise returns. We'd better work out a watch rota, Spock."

"You're not to stand a watch, Jim," McCoy intervened. "You need all the sleep you can get."

"Agreed, Doctor," said Spock before Kirk could get a word in. "Four of us will be enough to stand watches, you can take the last one."

"That's fine with me, Spock. I think there's a place close to those rocks where we might be comfortable enough to get some sleep. Are you coming, Jim?"

Kirk went with McCoy over to the rocks, leaving Spock to arrange the night watches. He found a clear space on the ground where he was able to lie down and at least be partially comfortable. By the time McCoy came over to him he was asleep, so McCoy left him in peace.

Kirk woke up some time later shivering with the cold and with his head aching intolerably. He rolled himself into a ball trying to get warm, but it was no use. He couldn't stop shaking. He tried to get back to sleep but his head

throbbed and he ached all over. The night passed slowly and he began to wonder if morning would ever come. He was vaguely aware of Spock's voice as the Vulcan woke McCoy to stand his watch.

McCoy woke as soon as he was called. It was still dark and wouldn't be light for a couple of hours yet. Spock lay down after telling McCoy to waken everyone as soon as it began to get light.

McCoy sat on a rock for a while, trying to make out detail in the blackness. He felt uneasy; something was wrong. Suddenly he heard a moan and quickly going to the source of the sound he found Kirk, shivering and huddled on the ground, McCoy knelt beside him and laid a hand on Kirk's brow. It was burning hot.

Kirk, feeling the Doctor's touch, opened his eyes, trying to make out the form in the inky blackness.

"Bon-es..." He croaked.

"Take it easy, Jim," McCoy said gently. "Don't try to speak." McCoy felt for his pulse."

"So...so...cold," Kirk stuttered and then broke into a spasm of coughing. It passed quickly but left him gasping with pain and holding his chest. He shivered uncontrollably.

Spock, wakened by the sound of Kirk's coughing, joined McCoy. He didn't need to ask what was wrong, he could see for himself.

"Spock, we've got to find a way to keep Jim warm. But we've got nothing to cover him with," McCoy said, trying to think of an answer. He suddenly had an idea. "Give me a hand to get those wet clothes off him."

Together they took off Kirk's clothes, which had been soaked by his sweat. McCoy then took off his own clothes and they put them on Kirk. He called Chekov and told him to lie down beside the Captain and hold him close; he then lay down on the other side and they tried to keep Kirk warm with the heat of their bodies.

Meanwhile, Spock and Freeman crossed the river at a narrow spot and made their way to the village that Spock had picked up on his tricorder. They sneaked in and managed to grab some blankets. They took as many as they could carry and hurried back to the river. They just made it as the sun came up.

McCoy heard them coming and got to his feet. Seeing the blankets, he and Chekov again stripped off the Captain's clothing, once more soaked with his sweat. The warmth of their bodies had helped, but Kirk was in a bad way. The coughing spells had become frequent, and he was finding breathing painful and difficult. He was still shivering and the sweat poured off him; he was burning with fever.

They quickly wrapped him in blankets and made him as comfortable as possible. Freeman had found a crude cup so McCoy filled it with water and gave Kirk a drink. Kirk took a couple of mouthfuls but then gagged on it and broke into a spasm of coughing. It was a severe one and he was in great pain. McCoy put an arm under his shoulders and lifted him slightly, trying to help.

"Easy, Jim." Meaningless words, the Doctor knew even as he spoke them. But he was helpless to do anything but try and calm his friend.

Gradually the spasm passed; exhausted by it, and wracked with pain, Kirk lay back on McCoy's arm, his face white against the rough homespun blanket. Gently the Doctor eased him to the ground again, tucking the blanket around, then straightened up.

A chilly wind had sprung up and onimous dark clouds were hurrying across the sky. McCoy felt a sudden spot of rain on his cheek and glanced anxiously at his patient. Despite the blankets, Kirk was shuddering as if with cold; and from time to time a faint moan escaped him. He was clearly only semi-conscious now.

"Spock," the Doctor said in an undertone, as if afraid that Kirk might

overhear him. "It won't do. We've got to find a shelter for him somehow - you can see that for yourself."

"Agreed, Doctor." Spock's expression was as near concern as was possible for him. "But this empty hillside does not look promising. There is insufficient vegetation even to cover the Captain adequately."

Chekov, discreetly not listening, was busy drawing the blankets closer around the Captain; they had been disturbed by Kirk's feverish movements and the light drizzle was beginning to sprinkle his head and shoulders. But Freeman, aware of his own partial responsibility for the Captain's condition, had been listening anxiously and now broke in.

"Mr. Spock! Sir! That ruined hut we passed at the edge of the village, couldn't we take the Captain there? It looked as if nobody ever uses it now."

"Thank you, Ensign." Spock's tone was a dismissal and Freeman retreated to help Chekov. The rain was coming down heavily now and a wind had sprung up; it was blowing the rain across the landscape in sheets. Chekov and Freeman sat with their backs to the wind, trying to shelter Kirk as best they could from the driving rain.

The First Officer moved away, going towards the river, tricorder swinging thoughtfully. McCoy followed him urgently.

"Well, Spock, what about it?"

"The village is three miles from here and the risk of encountering the natives is very great; the non-interference directive, as you know..."

McCoy opened his mouth to say, "Blast the non-interference directive!" but changed his mind. They were all bound by their oaths to uphold it, and cursing it wouldn't help. Instead he said, with as much calmness as he could, "It's Jim's life we're talking about, Spock. Another day out here, without food, warmth or shelter from this rain will kill him. He won't stand a chance."

Spock had been staring at his tricorder screen as if the answers were written there, but at this unaccustomed quietness in the Doctor's tone he lifted his head and glanced back towards the others. Kirk was lying huddled in blankets on the wet ground; Chekov and Freeman were sitting anxiously beside him, trying to shelter him a bit. Spock moved back towards them, with McCoy at his heels.

"Mr. Freeman - take your tricorder and scout ahead of us to the point where we crossed the river this morning. Mr. Chekov, give me a hand with the Captain."

McCoy let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding and hurried forward to help.

The rain was coming down even harder now and the going underfoot was treacherous. Spock was handicapped, carrying the unconscious Captain in his arms; it took them a while to reach the crossing place.

Freeman was waiting for them when they arrived, a worried look on his face. The river had risen since they'd last crossed, and it was flowing very fast. Crossing it wasn't going to be easy.

"Well, Spock, what do we do?" McCoy asked rather dejectedly.

Spock thought for a moment and then answered. "You say that the Captain will die if we don't get him to a shelter. It will not be easy getting across this river - but there is shelter on the other side. Logically, then, if we are not going to let Jim die, we must get across the river."

McCoy glanced sharply at the Vulcan. Spock's use of the Captain's first name indicated his worry and concern far more than his impassive face ever could. McCoy understood how close Kirk and Spock were, that very special relationship that they had between them - he probably understood it even better than they did. It wasn't a relationship you could describe with mere words, there was an empathy

between them; they were like two twins, but even closer.

Spock decided that the safest way to get Kirk across the river was for him to carry the Captain across on his shoulders. They wrapped Kirk tightly in a blanket to try and keep him dry and Chekov helped Spock to hoist him onto his shoulders.

They started to wade across the raging river, Freeman taking the lead followed by Spock with Kirk, McCoy and Chekov bringing up the rear. They were nearing the other side when McCoy looked upstream and was horrified to see a tree being swept down straight towards Spock. He yelled a warning, but it was too late. Spock was knocked from his feet and he and Kirk were carried off down the river. Spock managed to grab hold of Kirk and started swimming strongly towards the shore. Eventually he got close to the bank and managed to grab an overhanging branch.

The sudden immersion into the cold water brought Kirk back to consciousness. He found himself choking and struggling, trying to get his head above water, but he couldn't get his arms free. They seemed to be tied to his sides. Not understanding what was happening he panicked, swallowing even more water. Suddenly he felt himself grabbed and pulled up till his head was clear of the water. He couldn't make out who had grabbed him but he dimly realised they were in a river and making for the bank. After a while they stopped moving and Kirk realised that they must have reached the bank. He felt the water sweeping past him, trying to drag him out of the grip of his rescuer. Kirk started to struggle again, trying to free his arms, but all he succeeded in doing was to swallow more water. He choked on it and broke into a fit of coughing, fighting for breath. The pain across his chest was like a band of fire. Suddenly he heard a familiar voice speaking to him.

"Don't struggle, Jim. Help will be here soon."

Realising that it was Spock who held him, Kirk tried to relax. The fit of coughing passed and he lay in the water as still as he could, trusting in Spock completely.

McCoy had watched terrified as Spock and Kirk were swept down the river and out of sight round a bend. He got ashore as quickly as he could and with Chekov and Freeman he headed along the bank of the river, fearing the worst. They had almost given up hope when, ahead of them, they saw Spock holding onto a branch with one hand and hanging onto Kirk with the other. They ran to the edge of the river bank, McCoy shouting to Spock to let him know they were coming.

Kirk had lost track of time. The cold was creeping over him like a thick blanket and he was letting it do so. He knew that he should try to fight it but he hadn't the strength left. The warm darkness was enveloping him, a welcome release from the pain. Just before he lost consciousness, Kirk thought he heard McCoy's voice.

Freeman and Chekov managed to reach Spock and pull him nearer the shore, Then they got hold of Kirk and dragged him up onto the bank. They then helped Spock out of the water and Freeman handed him a blanket. Spock was grateful for it as he was shivering from the cold and wet.

McCoy quickly checked Kirk and realised that the Captain was barely breathing. He immediately started to give him artificial respiration. For a while there was no reaction, then Kirk started choking and coughed up a fair amount of water. McCoy picked up a blanket and began to rub Kirk down and to massage him, trying to restore his circulation. Eventually Kirk began to stir. He slowly opened his eyes and looked up at McCoy, trying to get him in focus.

McCoy smiled down at him. "Welcome back to the land of the living, Jim." McCoy hoped he sounded more cheerful than he felt.

Kirk struggled to speak but broke into another spasm of coughing, the pain slicing like a knife through his chest. When the bout of coughing passed he was totally exhausted by it and slipped back into the welcome escape of unconsciousness.

McCoy frowned and wrapped Kirk in the blankets, which were rather wet now. Then he went over to Spock. "How are you feeling, Spock?"

"I've felt warmer, Doctor. I suggest we start making our way to the hut and get the Captain in out of this rain."

McCoy agreed with this completely, so they started out towards the village. Chekov and Freeman carried Kirk between them this time, and Spock led the way, a blanket round his shoulders. McCoy brought up the rear. They had a good way to go as they had to make their way back up the river first, and it was mid-afternoon by the time they reached the hut. It was still raining hard and the wind was very strong.

Making sure that the hut was still empty, Chekov and Freeman carried Kirk into it and laid him gently on the floor. The trampled straw underfoot and the smell suggested that it had served as some sort of byre, but it was at least fairly wind and water proof inside. Their greatest worry, that of being overheard, was quieted to some extent; the nearest house was some distance away, and the strong wind was blowing towards them, drowning the sound of the Captain's fevered mutterings even inside the hut.

McCoy, assisted by Chekov, again stripped off the Captain's shirt and the rest of his clothes as they were all soaking wet. McCoy had managed to keep a couple of the blankets dry by wrapping them in another one, so he wrapped these around Kirk.

Despite the protection of the blankets and the woven hut walls, Kirk was shivering with cold and fever. His breathing came in racking gasps interspersed with painfully dry coughing, his face flushed with the effort.

The Doctor, checking his pulse once more, was concerned to find it very weak and irregular. Looking up, his eyes met Spock's in the gloom, and he shook his head slightly.

"He needs warmth, liquids, drugs - everything we can't give him here. There's nothing more I can do for him without proper medical facilities."

"We can get water from the river again," suggested Spock.

"That's not - " McCoy began, but broke off, startled, as the grey light from the doorway was suddenly blocked off. He and Freeman just had time to drag Kirk clear before the hut was invaded by two huge shaggy beasts, built something on the lines of Highland cattle, but standing almost six feet at the shoulder. Heads swinging, eyes rolling in mild astonishment at finding the shelter already occupied, they advanced into the centre of the open space and stood, their breath warming the chilly air. Evidently satisfied, they subsided with heavy grunts to the ground, their damp, shaggy black coats flapping around them.

"That's great," muttered McCoy, though not so loudly as to alarm them - he just didn't know their temper and wasn't wanting to take chances. "And just where are we supposed to sit?" For much of the floor-space was now filled by the sprawling creatures, and most of the rest by Kirk.

"What...what are they?" asked Chekov stupidly; he still hadn't recovered from the shock of their sudden appearance.

"Domestic animals, almost **certainly**..." Spock began, but he was interrupted by a small voice.

"Simba and Bonni," the small voice cut in.

Startled, their heads whipped round towards the doorway. Framed in it against the grey light was a humanoid - a child, judging by Earth standards. A little girl, perhaps three years old, with long black hair.

"Who are you? Why are you here? Are you bad men?" It was a child, evidently - but how unafraid she was! McCoy took it upon himself to answer.

"We're strangers. From a distant place. We're just sheltering here from

the rain. We mean no harm to your people."

Did she understand? Above all, she mustn't be frightened into calling for help. Curiosity and suspicion were in her face as she stood poised for flight. McCoy went on desperately. "We're good people, not bad men! And our Captain is hurt..."

Spock glanced at him; if the child reported this information there could be trouble ahead.

"Captain?" she asked in a puzzled voice. The word was clearly unfamiliar to her.

"Our - leader, Chieftain," supplied Chekov helpfully.

"Him," said the girl excitedly, pointing to Spock.

"No," replied Spock gravely. "This is our Leader." He drew aside to show her Kirk, huddled in his blankets on the floor.

The girl came closer, picking her way among the feet of the beasts, obviously unconcerned by their presence.

"He is - sick? My mother was sick last Spring. We gave her lana' cala. She is well now."

"Lana' cala?" queried Spock.

"You know," she said, with an impatient stamp. "From the garanas." The faces around her were still puzzled. "Like these. Simba and Bonni. Bonni has lana' cala still, because she has a baby, but Simba does not have any."

"Milk!" exclaimed McCoy, the light suddenly breaking. Then, with growing excitement, "Can you...er...how do you get lana' cala? May we have some?" But the child had lost interest and was looking at Kirk now.

"He does not have the right ears, but his hair is a funny colour - like gold! Is that why he is your King?"

"Never mind that now," said McCoy impatiently. "The lana' cala. Have you seen anyone getting it from the garanas? How is it done?"

The child merely looked bewildered and a little frightened at the Doctor's abrupt tone.

"I don't understand," she said, backing away slightly.

"Maybe I could try," volunteered Freeman diffidently. "If it's anything like milking a cow - I was raised on a farm and I used to be a good hand at it."

At Spock's nod he cautiously approached the nearest beast, clutching the cup in one hand. With a snuffle it rose to its feet and stood blowing gently, eyeing his advances dubiously. Freeman ran his empty hand along its side, but it started nervously from his touch.

"Watch out for its feet," warned Chekov. "The Captain's not far away from it."

"What are you doing?" asked the child, puzzled.

"We need lana' cala - for the King," explained Spock.

"Oh, that. Give me the cup and I will show you. My father taught me," said the child proudly, and took the cup from Freeman's eager hand. As she ducked down beside the huge beast for a few moments her voice was muffled.

"Haven't you got any garanas?" she asked. Then straightening, she held out the cup. "Here you are." It was brimming with lana' cala - warm, new milk.

Carefully McCoy took it from her, fearful of spilling any, and carried it across to Kirk. With Chekov's help, he propped the Captain up, steadying him against one arm and holding the cup close to his lips.

"C'mon, Jim."

Kirk opened glazed eyes, looking vaguely at the cup. "Wha...?" he croaked.

"Lana' cala. Try it - Doctor's orders."

Wearily, Kirk closed his eyes again. Understanding was too much effort.

"Jim!" The voice persisted. A smell, vaguely familiar, was coming to him now, and the rim of a cup was pressing against his lips, tilting - not water again, this was warm. Reluctantly he sipped, then sipped again as the soothing warm milk reached his parched mouth and dry throat. He tried to gulp it and choked, coughing violently. McCoy drew the cup back and waited, concerned, till the fit of coughing passed. Then he brought the cup to Kirk's lips again.

"Take it slowly, Jim. Slowly - that's the way."

The cup was emptied, filled again by the wondering child, then drained once more. Satisfied, Kirk sank back against McCoy's arm.

"Wish all your remedies were more like that, Bones," he whispered, hoarsely, managing a glimmer of a smile. "That was..." the sentence finished in a sigh. The Captain was asleep.

McCoy lowered him gently to the ground, made him comfortable, and then stood up. "Thank you, Miss...?"

"My name is Ara."

"Thank you, Ara. You have helped him get well. We are very grateful."

"Yes, he will be well soon. Like my mother." As if this was a reminder, Ara wandered towards the door. "It has stopped raining. I shall go home and tell her..."

"Why don't you stay here a while and talk to us?" intervened McCoy hastily. "We'd like to hear about your family."

Freeman approached the little girl. "Could you show me how to get the lana' cala from Bonni?"

"Yes," said Ara proudly. "Watch how I do it."

Freeman watched carefully and then had a go himself. Since he was used to milking a cow he soon got the knack. He tried a cup and found it very pleasant and warming, so he offered it around to the others. They were all feeling the cold and the milk warmed them up.

The afternoon wore away. Ara, alternately chattering about herself, her family and her pets, and listening to the stories spun by her new friends, seemed happy enough, but for the Enterprise party it seemed to last an eternity. Every sound outside seemed to be the approach of one of the humanoids from the village and imminent discovery. And there was the problem of Ara - how long before she was missed? Dared they let her go back and lead others to them? Even if she promised to say nothing, there was little hope they could depend on her, she was so young. But what alternative was there?

McCoy chewed these ideas over as he sat beside Kirk, holding a damp cloth on Kirk's hot forehead. Kirk was delirious and muttering unintelligibly. Sweat was dripping off him. McCoy asked Freeman to get another cup of milk and he then tried to get Kirk to drink some of it. Supporting the Captain he held the cup to his lips.

"Jim, try some more milk."

Kirk was only semi-conscious but when he smelt the warm milk he instinctively sipped it. McCoy made sure he didn't take it too fast. When the cup was empty McCoy gently laid Kirk down and pulled the blankets up closer round him. He frowned as he looked down at his friend, wishing there was more he could do. Then he resumed his seat beside the Captain, and placed the damp cloth on his forehead; he looked over at Ara.

Spock had her on his knee at the moment, telling her some tale of Vulcan's legendary past, carefully adapted for his present audience. Ara sat wrapt, asking questions, darting from idea to idea, trying to guess how the story would end. In spite of his worry, McCoy couldn't help smiling at the sight of Spock in this unusual role, almost relaxed for once, evidently living his own childhood again. The words couldn't be heard over here on the other side of the hut, for the wind was still blowing strongly, but McCoy's smile spread to a grin as he saw Chekov leaning closer, anxious not to miss anything. The story would to its conclusion and Spock sat silent, Ara's head against his shoulder. In the sudden hush, Chekov's voice came clearly.

"But what happened to...?"

With a wave, Spock quietened him, indicating the child in his lap. Ara was asleep.

Carefully, so as not to waken her, Spock passed her across to Freeman and rose, stretching himself, then joined McCoy.

McCoy looked sideways at him, and said banteringly, "Vulcan lost a good nursemaid when you joined Starfleet, Spock." But Spock chose to ignore this one.

"How is the Captain, Doctor?"

McCoy's face lost its grin and he became suddenly serious. "His fever's coming to a peak. We'll know one way or the other soon, Spock."

Spock looked down at Kirk's fever flushed face. Only he knew what thoughts were going through his mind; McCoy could read nothing on that poker straight face.

Suddenly, they were both startled by a distant voice shouting.

"Ara! Ara!"

Ara woke abruptly, looked round in sleepy bewilderment, smiled up at Freeman, then padded across to Spock and the others.

"I must go. Thank you for the story, sir," she said politely, as if making her goodbyes at a party. She looked down at the unconscious Captain. "Your King will soon be well. The lana' cala will cure him, as it did my mother."

"Thank you, Ara," said McCoy. "Would you do something else for us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you not tell about us being here for a while? Of course," he added hastily, seeing her eyes widening, "you shouldn't tell lies if they ask you, but if they don't ask you..."

"Oh, they won't," said the child confidently. "They never do."

"Thank you, Ara. Good night."

"Goodnight, sir." A pause, then as she looked down at Kirk again, "His ears aren't like his," she said, indicating Spock. "Like in the stories. But his hair is gold, isn't it?" Then she was gone, ducking out into the darkness.

Outside, a scolding voice said, "Ara, where have you been? It's long past your bedtime."

The men held their breath for a moment.

"Only inside the old hut with Bonni and Simba." The footsteps died away and McCoy let out a sigh of relief.

"Bon-es," a voice suddenly croaked and McCoy looked down at Kirk in surprise. Kirk's eyes were open and his face had lost the flushed look. He was pale and drawn. McCoy quickly knelt beside him.

"Easy, Jim. Don't try to talk." McCoy put his arm under Kirk's shoulders

and eased him into a sitting position. He took the cup of warm milk that Freeman handed him and let Kirk sip it slowly. Kirk drained the cup, then his eyes closed and he became a dead weight on McCoy's arm. McCoy took a quick check of his pulse, then, reasonably satisfied, wrapped the blankets closely round the Captain, making him as comfortable as possible. He looked up as Spock came across to him.

"How is he, Doctor?"

"Well, the fever's broken, his pulse is stronger, and he's breathing easier. He's sleeping now and that's the best thing for him."

Spock nodded, then said, "We had all better try and get some sleep. The Enterprise will not be back until morning. We will stand the same watches as last night."

"No, Spock " McCoy interrupted. "I'd rather stay awake and keep an eye on Jim. You three can get some sleep."

Spock did not argue - he felt it would indeed be better if McCoy sat up with Kirk, so he, Chekov and Freeman lay down when they could and were soon asleep.

The night passed slowly and McCoy kept his lonely vigil beside Kirk. The Captain slept peacefully, however, and as the hours passed McCoy's spirits rose.

Dawn was just breaking when McCoy was startled by the bleeping of one of the communicators. He took it out and flipped it open, to hear -

"Enterprise to Captain Kirk." It was Scotty's voice.

Spock joined McCoy and took the communicator from him. "Enterprise, this is Spock. Lock on to my signal and prepare to beam up five. Have a medical team in the transporter room; we have a casualty."

"Affirmative, Mr. Spock. Standing by."

McCoy and Spock lifted Kirk and held him supported between them. They were joined by Chekov and Freeman. Spock spoke into the communicator.

"Energise."

The landing party dematerialised and the garanas looked slightly startled as the men vanished. Then the hut was empty, except for the two animals, the blankets, and the crude cup.

Later that morning, at breakfast, Ara's mother was complaining. "I don't know where those blankets have got to. I'm sure I left them in the back room."

"I know where they are," Ara said importantly. "The Good People took them. One of them had pointed ears - just like in the stories. They were for the King - he was sick. But he didn't have pointed ears."

"What on earth are you talking about?" exclaimed her mother.

"In the old hut, yesterday, there were five of them. But I expect they've gone now."

Ara's father smiled indulgently, but her mother looked a little alarmed.

"Kenor, you don't suppose... There have been bad men around recently."

"If it makes you happy, we'll go and look."

The hut was quite empty, of course - although the blankets were there. Kenor smiled at Ara. "'Fraid they've flown away, eh, Ara?"

"Yes. But he did have gold hair," said Ara thoughtfully.

Unbeknown to Ara, her golden-haired King was, at that precise moment, regaining consciousness in the sickbay of a Starship, which was already a couple

of light years from her planet and speeding further away every second.

Kirk gradually became aware of his surroundings and of McCoy's voice.

"He's going to be very weak for a while and it'll be two or three weeks before he's fit for duty, but we've a lot to thank Ara for, that milk saved his life. Without it he would never have survived long enough for us to get him back on board."

"She was an interesting child," agreed Spock.

"Ara?" asked Kirk hoarsely.

Both Spock and McCoy spun round at the sound of Kirk's voice and went to him. "How are you feeling, Jim?" asked McCoy.

"A bit like someone's been using me for a punch bag. Who is Ara?"

"A very nice little girl who saved your life. Don't you remember anything?"

"Everything's rather hazy...like a dream." Kirk's voice began to sound strained. "I can't..."

"Easy, Jim. Don't try to force it." McCoy laid a hand gently on Kirk's arm and smiled down at him. "You were pretty sick, it's not surprising that you don't remember."

"Ara was one of the natives, Captain," supplied Spock. "I made an error in thinking we would remain undisturbed in the hut."

"Look, if anyone's to blame, I am..." cut in McCoy.

"The responsibility..."

"Gentlemen," interrupted Kirk with an effort, "there's no point in arguing about it now. The question is, how much damage was done? Does anyone else know about us?"

"I think it unlikely, Captain. The girl was very young and she had no idea who we really were."

"Fine. What's happening now?"

"We are on course for Starbase 11, sir. We will be there in eleven point five six days."

Kirk was becoming drowsy again. His eyes were getting heavy and he was having a job to keep them open. McCoy saw this.

"That's enough talking for now, Jim. You need to get some rest. If you behave and so as you're told, I might even let you up in time to go on shore leave."

Kirk felt that he ought to answer that but he just didn't have the energy. His eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep.

McCoy looked down at the sleeping figure and smiled. "He'll be fine, Spock."

Spock nodded and left silently, to get on with the business of running the ship.
